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Western Story Magazine

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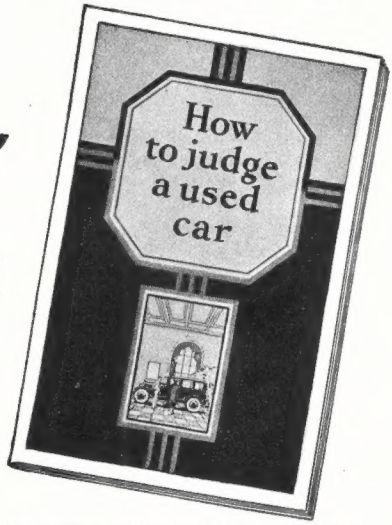

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WS—1D

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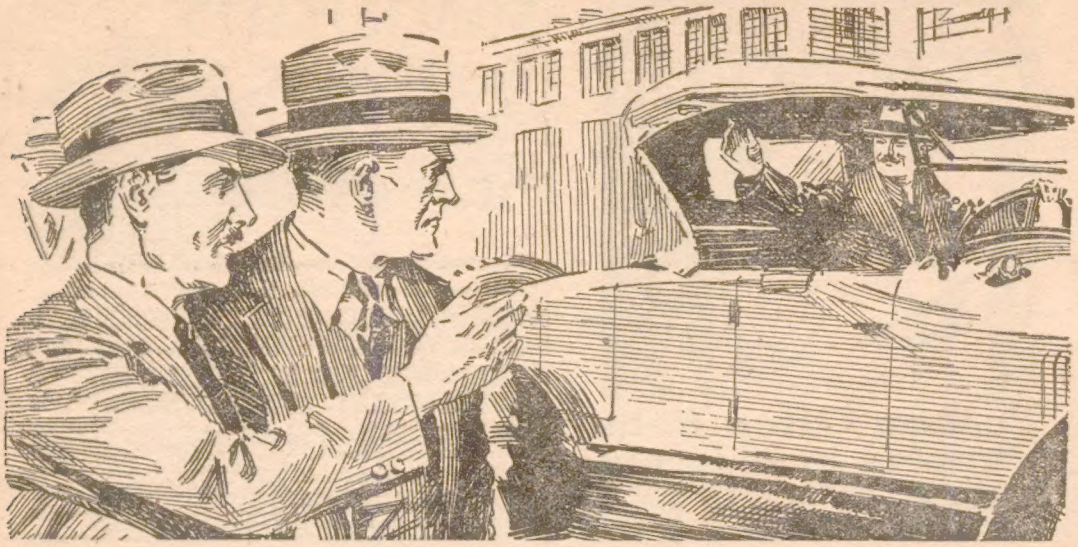

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"'I'm through wasting my spare time like this,' he said one night. 'I'm going to take up a course with the International Correspondence Schools and try to make something of myself before it is too late.'

"We didn't see much of Bob after that—he'd always laugh and say he was 'too busy' when we'd ask him to join a party.

"Look at him now. A big man in a big job. Making five times as much as I'll ever make. Oh, what a fool I was not to send in that I. C. S. coupon when he did!"

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Jesse G. Vincent was a toolmaker before he enrolled with the I. C. S. He is now Vice-president of the Packard Motor Car Company. Walter Chrysler, President of the Chrysler Corporation, is also a former I. C. S. student. So is "Eddie" Rickenbacker, the famous flying ace, who is now Vice-president and Director of Sales for the Rickenbacker Motor Company.

An I. C. S. course enabled Fred W. Southworth to leave a poorly paying job that he had held *for twenty years* and get a position as a salesman. In six months he increased his salary more than 300 per cent.

George A. Grieble is another man who lifted himself out of the rut by spare-time study. He was a stone cutter earning $15 a week when he enrolled with the I. C. S. He now has his own architectural and engineering business in Cleveland and his income is "between $10,000 and $15,000 a year."

If the I. C. S. can help these men to get out of the rut and make good, it can help you too. If it can raise the salaries of other men, it can raise yours! At least find out how.

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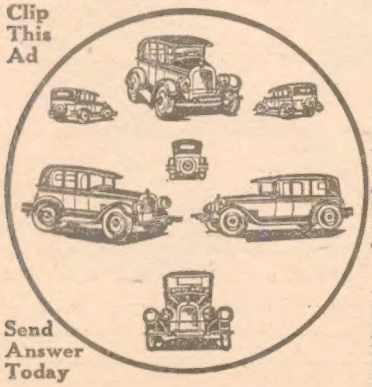

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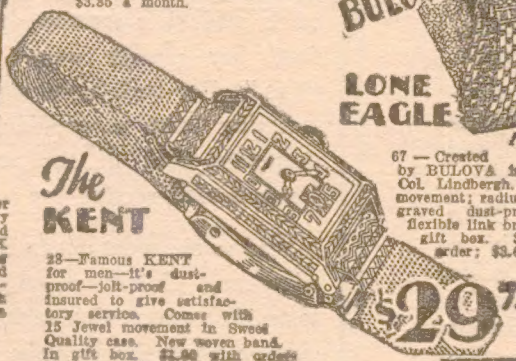

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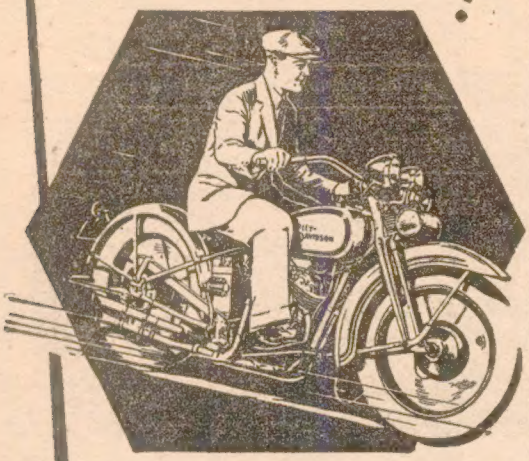

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And so she went out to her first great adventure. But it was only the prelude to an almost incredible series of thrilling episodes through which she was to move with head held high. How Dawn found herself, in very earnest, "doubling" for the star, how she fell in love, and how she finally won her way to happiness —these make "The Splendid Folly" a splendid story.

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"Watch him make a fool of himself"—*I heard someone whisper*

—*then I started to play!*

IT was the first big party of the season and the fun was at its height. The room fairly rocked with laughter as Jim finished his side-splitting imitation of a ballet-dancer.

Tom, who was giving the party, turned to me and said, "And now our young friend here will give us his well-known imitation of Paderewski!"

Instantly all attention centered upon me. Feigning reluctance, I made as if to beg off, but was forthwith dragged to the piano. Admonitions of "Come on, old-timer, do your stuff!"—"Don't be bashful!"—came from all sides.

They expected me to do my usual clowning—but I had a surprise up my sleeve for them. Just as I was about to begin, I heard someone whisper, "Watch him make a fool of himself—why, *he can't play a note!*"

I Surprised My Friends

They thought I was going to give them my one-finger rendition of chop-sticks. But instead I swung into the opening bars of "The Road to Mandalay"—that rollicking soldier song of Kipling's. You should have seen the look of amazement that spread over their faces. This was not the clowning they had expected! Then Tom began to sing. One by one they joined in, until soon they were all crowding around the piano, singing away at the top of their lungs.

It was almost an hour before they let me get up from the piano. Then a deluge of questions: "How in the world did you ever do it?"—"Where did you study?"—"When did you learn to play?"—"Who was your teacher?"—"How long have you studied?"

"One at a time, please," I begged. "I'll tell you all about it. To begin with, *I didn't have any teacher.*"

"What! Say, you don't expect us to believe that, do you?"

"Sure thing. But I don't blame you for not believing it. I wouldn't have myself. As you know, I've never been able to play. But I always liked music, and many a time when I was pepping up a party with my clowning I would have given anything in the world to be able to sit down at the piano and really play.

"But it never occurred to me to take lessons. I thought I was too old—and besides, I couldn't see my way clear towards paying an expensive teacher—to say nothing of the long hours I'd have to put in practicing.

How I Learned to Play

"But one day I noticed an advertisement for the U. S. School of Music. This school offered to teach music by a new and wonderfully simplified method which didn't require a teacher, and which averages only a few cents a day.

"Well, boys, that certainly sounded good to me, so I filled out the coupon and sent for the Free Demonstration Lesson. When it arrived I found that it seemed even easier than I had hoped.

"I made up my mind to take the course. And believe me that was the luckiest decision of my life! Why, almost before I knew it, I was playing simple tunes! And I studied just whenever I pleased, a few minutes a day in my spare time. Now I can play anything I like—ballads, classical numbers, jazz. Listen to this!"

With that I snapped into a tantalizing jazz number. All evening I was the center of a laughing, singing, hilarious group. And it's been that way at every party I've attended since.

* * * * * *

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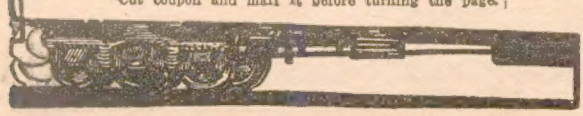

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Just insert can in holder and turn crank. Top is cut completely out inside the rim. Juices can't spill out.

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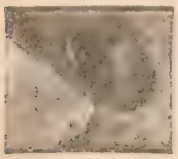

No Jagged Edges
Speedo cuts the top out, smooth, slick, and clean. Ends danger of cut fingers.

EVERY man who has cut his eye teeth in the selling game knows this! The big clean-ups are always made by men who get in on the ground floor with something new and sensational. Think, then, what a doubly sensational chance to coin money is now yours! For here are offered you two unique devices—pronounced by experts everywhere to be absolutely revolutionary — approved by Good Housekeeping Institute, Modern Priscilla, etc.—and real necessities in every home. In your wildest dreams, could you conjure up such an amazing opportunity for quick, easy profits?

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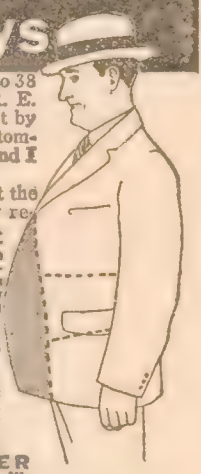

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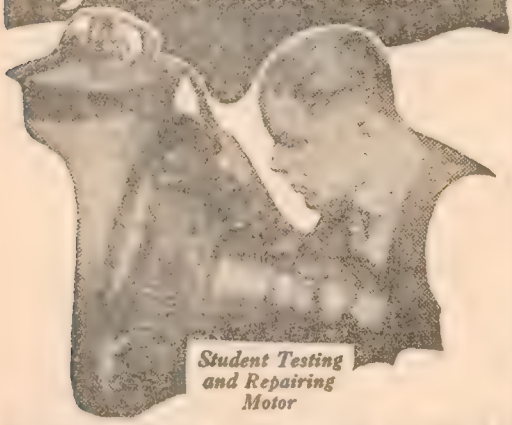

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By Vivian Grey

She was rich. And he was poor. She gave him up because she didn't want to break his mother's heart, the heart of the woman who had saved and scrimped so that he might go to college and get away from the manual labor that seemed destined for him.

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In a way, it is true that most of us act on impulse at one time or another, trusting somehow to the hidden voices within us that our actions may be for the best. The author of this absorbing story tells what may happen when we make impulse the guide to life. It is a story of youth in the grip of a great love that is here before us, a book that we do not lay aside until the last page is read, and one that we take up again, for it is well worth the rereading.

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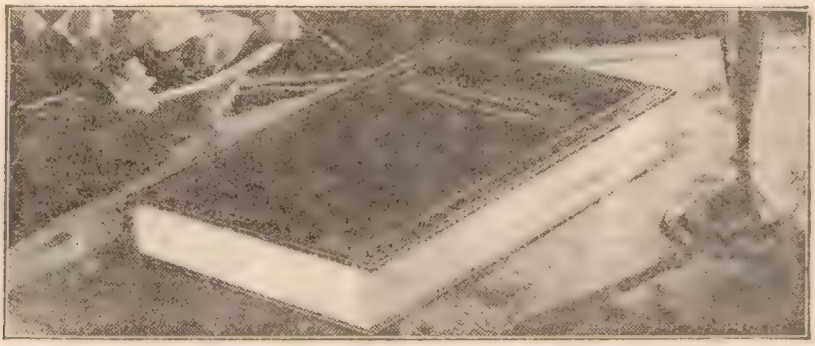

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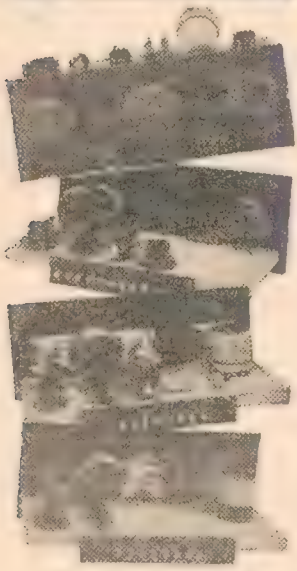

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The Duster's Return

By Max Brand

Author of "Twisted Bars," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE SHERIFF BRINGS NEWS.

THE face of Renney was never greatly welcome around the Ridley house, while The Duster and I were staying there. Of course, The Duster had the best reasons in the world for not wanting to have a sheriff around; and though I've luckily kept out of danger of the law, still no man likes to have the shadow of the jail falling across the toes of his boots, and every time I see a policeman I begin to think back to the time when I stole apples, and swiped watermelons in the moonlight. But this afternoon I was less glad than ever to see the sheriff riding in from the road through the trees.

For one thing, it was hot, and when I say hot I don't mean what they call in the East "that dreadful humidity." No, I mean the dry heat that they tell you in the West is so healthy. Maybe it is. So is an oven then. Everything felt it. The bluejay that went overhead like a jewel seemed looking for shade more than mischief, and the two squirrels that used to scold me every day at the top of their lungs, now moved slowly through the branches of the trees and only swore at me now and then, softly, as though they were saving their breath. It was so hot that the sun fire heaped up higher and higher on the naked ground outside the grove, so that you could see it shimmering like water, and looking through it the mountains appeared out of joint, as though they were reflected in a cheap mirror. Then, now and again, the wind rose just strongly enough to topple that pile of flame and send it invisibly sliding and pouring in among the tree trunks. When it reached me, it burned the damp back of my hand dry in a minute and made the hairs stand up and the skin prickle; it burned my eyes and slid like scalding water down my neck.

On that day, there was no comfort except in a pipe and in looking down the hill through the trees to where the Christmas River was running pale blue, like the sky, with a white cloud or two stuck in the quiet shallows at the bend. Talk was the last effort that I wanted to make. I had finished the lunch dishes and scrubbed out the kitchen and

had everything ship-shape, and I swore that the only hot thing The Duster should have for supper would be coffee, so that the afternoon lay ahead of me as restful as the run of the river itself. Even thinking was hard, and it was better to watch the brown trunks turn into green leaves and needles, and the foliage turn into the sky, and the sky turn into the great white sun flare that was traveling slowly west toward the horizon.

But there came the sheriff on the same runty mustang that he usually rode, biting at its bit, jerking out its head to make the reins slip through his hands, and always hunting for half a chance to get hysterical or just plain mean. He had an eye as red as a ferret's, and looked as though he lived on raw meat. But there was Renney in the saddle looking tired, not of the horse but of things in general.

He looked like a tramp. He hadn't shaved for a week, and his nose was whisky-red from the weather, and he wore an old red-flannel shirt that was sun-faded to a dirty pink over the shoulders, and caked with dirt and dust.

He came up, drew rein, and dismounted with a jingle of spurs and groan of stirrup leathers, while the mustang tried to take a piece out of his shoulder. It missed, and threw up its fool head and stuck out a stiff upper lip, ready to receive what it deserved. Renney was too tired and hot to bother with that, though, and he only made a threatening motion with his hand. I waved my pipe at him by way of greeting.

"Is The Duster here?" says he.

"The Duster ain't," said I.

"Rode out?"

"Yes."

"When is he due?"

"Don't know."

"You're glad to see me, it look like," says Renney. "Shall I sit down and rest my feet? Thanks, I will. You got a pretty cool place here," says he, as another wash of the sun fire came drifting through and burned me to the bone.

He wasn't joking, either. He'd been out where the air was all aflame and this shade felt good to him.

"How are things?" said Renney.

"Fair," said I, seeing that he was bent on talking and making sure that I wouldn't say a word. Because I guessed that he wanted me to talk about The Duster, and I knew too much about him to get going on the subject.

"You got a toothache, maybe," suggested Renney, arranging himself beside me on the doorstep, "and don't want to open your mouth and let in the cold air?"

"Renney," said I, "what are you after?"

"Ideas," said he.

"About what?"

"About The Duster."

"I'm glad you let me know," said I. "I thought that maybe you'd ridden over this way for the sake of the scenery, or the exercise, or something."

Renney grinned, but the smile didn't last long.

"Old son," said he, "how long are you going to stick with this?"

"I'm leaving in a coupla days," said I.

"You said that last month."

I sighed. It was true. Every day I told myself that The Duster was a crook and that if I didn't look out, he'd make me another. But every morning I put off leaving until the next day.

"He's got a hold on me," I admitted.

"He has on me, too," said Renney.

"Aye," I answered, "but not as big as you'd like to have on him. With handcuffs, if you could make them fit!"

"Sure—at first," said he. "But I'm not so certain of that now."

He stopped in the making of a cigarette, a sure sign that a man is dreaming. It began to seem to me that he was thinking out loud.

"I don't make him out," says the sheriff. "We know that The Duster is the best all around gunman and yegg and slick gambler in this part of the world. He'd admit it himself! But in the midst of his fame, as you might say, and while the world is still at his feet, what does he do but chuck everything, as far as we can see, and come here to settle down?"

I thought of the Muncie bank robbery, but I didn't speak, naturally.

"Then," went on Renney, "he makes a grand play to get permission of the minister to bury the ashes of his old partner, Manness, up there in the cemetery, and though the minister fights hard, somehow The Duster manages to get the thing done—I don't know how. Then he makes a play to get young Tommy Lamont over on his side, and the first thing that you know, we find Tommy carrying hundreds of thousands of dollars of stolen money; and Tommy's jailed; and The Duster gets him loose!"

"Does he?" said I innocently.

"You know he did," said the sheriff, with a good deal of decision. "In the first place, there's no other man in the world who would've been able to do that job. Well, The Duster did it, and the whole town is sure that he did, and the whole town loves him for doing it! Isn't that clear? He made a fool of me, that night, but I don't carry a grudge on that account. Only—I'd like to talk things over with him."

"He'd like to, I'm sure," said I, lying pretty easy.

Because I knew that no matter how often The Duster had fooled Renney, still, he was pretty much afraid of the brains of that man. I couldn't see why, when he'd showed the upper hand so often.

Just as we were talking, along comes a couple of riders flickering down the road past the tree trunks and stop in front of the house. We can hear their voices, and the first is that of the minister's daughter, Marguerite Lamont, saying something to "Duster, dear!" and The Duster answers. We hear them laugh like a song together, and I look at the sheriff and see him wearing a frown that is half painful and half mere thought.

Then The Duster comes toward us, and the girl gallops away. The Duster comes toward us, singing, and this was the song that he sang. It comes up into my memory like a sound up a well shaft, hollow and sweet:

"Oh, my name was William Kid,
  As I sailed, as I sailed;
My name was William Kid
  As I sailed.
And I murdered Mister Moore,
For I hit him from before,
And I left him in his gore
  As I sailed."

It wasn't the sort of a song that sounds cheerful; particularly when a fellow like The Duster is doing the singing. How many did he leave in their gore? Well, I never heard from him, and what others say you never can believe. Gossip always talks in headlines and capital letters.

When he saw the sheriff, he reined his horse straight over and dismounted and shook hands. He was such a fine actor that you would have thought that he was meeting one of his best friends. I mean, he was cordial, and grave, and considerate. Renney went to the mark like a bullet.

He said: "Duster, what's it all about? Come clean with me and tell me what you aim at here in Christmas?"

"Why, Renney," says The Duster, opening his eyes very innocent, "I want a quiet home after a hard and troubled life. That's all that I want."

Sometimes I thought that he overdid his acting; but perhaps that was because I'd lived so close to him and began to know him so well. Renney narrowed his eyes.

"That's what I want to be sure of," said he.

"Or?" says The Duster, raising his eyebrows a little.

He was mocking Renney, demanding what he could do, as you might say, flaunting his safety under the nose of the sheriff, but Renney didn't lose his temper.

"Not to you, Duster, at present," says he. "But I'm wondering about others. Straight men make others straight. If you're really settling down here, then perhaps the boy was sent off to go straight, also. Tommy Lamont, I mean."

"I don't know anything about him," says The Duster.

"You don't know where he is?"

"No, of course not. Poor Tommy! Since he broke jail I've not heard from him."

Renney smiled a little.

"I can tell you, then," said he. "He's up in Canada in a logging camp, in British Columbia!"

CHAPTER II.

SHERIFF RENNEY HITS HARD.

THAT was a stroke. It hit The Duster between wind and water, and such a look as he gave the sheriff I hope I'll never receive. You could see the cold, hard consideration in his eyes, as he asked himself whether it would not pay to draw a gun on Renney. He decided not in the next instant, but he was so hard hit that his color had changed, and his nostrils quivered.

I never had been quite sure of The Duster's attitude toward Tommy Lamont. At first I thought he simply used the youngster as a leverage to work on the minister; and after that, as a hold on the affection of Marguerite Lamont. But this day it showed in his face that he loved the boy.

Even that calm, steady voice of his, always under such good control, now went out of hand and shook as he said: "You're going to extradite him and bring him down here, Renney?"

The sheriff made a long pause.

"It's my duty to do that," he said. "I owe that to the law."

"'Baldy,'" said The Duster to me, "will you fix me up a cup of coffee?"

I was gathering my heels under me with a groan, when Renney interrupted with: "You might as well let him stay with us, Duster. You can't buy me off with cash."

That was another stroke. I felt that for the first time in my life I was watching The Duster play a losing game, and I got excited and curious. My respect for Renney went up a thousand per cent, at least. I remembered what The Duster himself once had said—that a crook always has a big advantage over an honest man, because the crook is always dealing from the bottom of the deck. Yet here was Renney taking tricks!

The Duster made a little gesture with both hands.

"What can I do, Renney?" he asked.

"Be good," said the sheriff.

I thought it was a joke, and got ready to smile. Then I saw that I was wrong and that Renney meant what he said. Be good!

"What has that to do with Tom Lamont?" snapped The Duster.

"This. I've had my eye at long distance on Tom ever since he reached that lumber camp, and it appears that he's trying to do what's right. Which makes me think that you gave him some right advice when you took him out of the jail and sent him away. But I'm not sure. I'm watching both ends of the line—Tommy up there, and you down here. A wrong step from you, and I get you if I can—but most certainly I get Tommy!"

The Duster took out a handkerchief and wiped his forehead. He was think-

ing as hard as he was able, I knew, and fighting something out inside himself.

"You've made yourself a factor in this town," went on the sheriff. "The boys think you're the greatest man in the world. The tramps and dead-beat prospectors, and broken-down punchers, they love you because you've ladled out money to them and shown them through a good many tough spots in their going. And even the old-time respectable citizens are now willing to say that probably John P. Thurlow is no longer The Duster, but an honest man trying to go straight. It may have been the bright example of The Duster that sent Tommy Lamont wrong; but it's also fair to say that The Duster seems to have brought Tom back onto the right trail. Now, Duster, I've come to you and I'm asking you for surety."

"What?"

"Surety that you'll stay straight from now on."

"And then?"

"Then I forget the past. My duty is to arrest poor young Lamont. But I don't want to. I ride in the name of the law, but I want my work to count among good men. I'd rather keep one man straight than arrest a thousand crooks. I want to see Tommy Lamont go right. But a thousand times rather than that, I'd see The Duster really turn into John P. Thurlow, honest citizen of the town of Christmas."

Now, take it by and large, that was the most surprising speech that I ever heard from any man. It suddenly popped my eyes open. We can't help looking on the police as our enemies; but suddenly it occurred to me that really they're our best friends. But they harden up their hands and their words for crooks, and that's the side of them we see. It dawned on me that the sheriff not only was honest, and brave, and smart, but that he had a heart of gold. He was the enemy of no man except the thugs.

"You want surety," said The Duster. "Well, I'm here living peaceably in Christmas."

"You may drop over the hill any day and bust a bank to smithereens."

The Duster took thought.

"What sort of security do you want?" he asked.

"The security that most men give, for they take root like a tree and bind themselves to society."

"That sounds rather educated and difficult to me," said The Duster, with a trace of a sneer.

"You understand me perfectly," said the sheriff, without any anger in the face of that mockery.

"You mean, Renney, that I should settle down and raise a family—give my bond to society in that way?"

"You hit the nail on the head."

"Lead up the girl, then," says The Duster. "I'm to step out and ask the first comer if she'll take a chance with an ex-crook?"

"You know I don't mean that," replied Renney. "And the strongest reason that brought me here to-day was a girl. I mean Marguerite Lamont, Duster."

Well, it would have done you good, knowing what The Duster was, to see how the sheriff paralyzed him time after time, in this way. If he had been upset by the mention of Tommy, he was simply staggered by this talk of Tom's sister. He looked fighting hot again, snapping out: "What of her, Renney?"

"I'm not insulting you," said Renney gently. "But the whole town except her father has seen what I've seen. Her eyes are always on you when you're around, and she gives away her hand every second; as every good woman does, I think, and thank Heaven for it! Only, Duster—suppose she gives her hand away to the wrong man?"

The Duster glared at the sheriff, then

at me, as if he would have struck us both. Then he started up and walked back and forth with long, quick strides, and his horse started to follow him, making a lot of clumsy evolutions to keep up with his master.

There was a good deal of meaning to that—the horse and the man—the pricked ears of the beast, and the dark, working face of The Duster. People and animals both had reason to fear him, and yet they loved him, too.

Renney said not a word. He reached over and made a little stack of pine needles, like a child building a house. He was building a house, for that matter, and I certainly admired his craft.

"I suppose you haven't talked about this in other places, Renney?" said The Duster at last, coming to a halt in front of the sheriff, and still looking as though he would love a fight with almost anything.

"Of course not," says the sheriff. "It's your business, Duster, and not mine at all. I'm only asking you. And, in the first place, do you know a woman you like better?"

"Better than that child?" said The Duster, throwing up his head.

"Aye, better than Marguerite Lamont."

"Renney, do you hear me?" said The Duster. "Suppose a marriage to her would seem to you a proper giving of hostages to society. But what of her? What hostages can I give her? What surety?"

"Your word, man, which you've never broken, so far as I know."

That was a good touch. It surprised me. But when I came to think of it, I couldn't remember that The Duster ever had been accused of making his way by lies.

He gripped his hands and stared desperately at Renney.

"Man, man," said he, "you know what I've been. I've come when I chose, and left when I chose. I've had what I wanted and when I wanted it. I've picked out a road and never asked where it led. I've ridden by day; but I've ridden by night also. I've worked when there was spice in the job. I've lazed when I felt like it. And the thing's in my blood. How can I give it up?"

"You've been hunted like a fox," answered Renney. "You've slept in snow—like that trip you made west from Alberta—and you've ridden rods in February—as when you jumped from Detroit straight through to Butte. You've starved for a month at a time, as you did in the Pecos country three years ago. You've gone in rags, or hardly clothed—the way you got out of Phœnix not so long back. You've had your money by the hundreds of thousands, but you've lost it, squandered it, fooled it away, used it to bribe or buy weak 'good' men, lavished it on fine horses, dropped it at races, spilled it out like water for a few bright days in New Orleans, or New York, or Denver. You've learned to be startled by your own shadow; to jump up wide awake when the wind whispers at night; to never sit except with your back to the wall; to keep away from windows and doors; and always to have your right hand empty, and ready to grab the butt of a gun! Do you call that a happy life?"

The Duster reflected.

"Aye," said he, then, "better than eight hours a day; carpet slippers and a newspaper at night; a baby squalling at dawn; and the first of the month like a gun at your head."

How would the sheriff answer that, I wondered? He had the answer pat.

"She would make up the difference, and more," said he.

I saw The Duster fumble at his throat like a schoolboy puzzled by a hard question.

"I can take the chance when I'm gambling only with myself; but how

could I gamble on her happiness? Suppose I made some wrong step; or that she had a look into the story I've lived; or that I stopped lying and drawing the curtain over what I've been? It would break her heart!"

"You talk," said Renney, "like a child. There's only one real wrong that you could do to such a woman, and that would be to stop loving her."

He stood up as he said it, and The Duster went and caught him by the shoulders.

"Renney," said he, "could I do it?"

Imagine The Duster, if you can, saying such a thing?

"I can't answer you," says Renney, with a twisted grin. "You'll have to ask Marguerite."

The Duster did not speak again. But he got to the back of his horse and into the saddle with one prodigious leap, and was gone away through the trees like a frightened wild cat.

I waited until the dust of his going had settled down, and the last dead leaf had fluttered back to a place on earth. And still I stared after him, seeing in my mind the way that bay must be turning the curves under the spur, and the look of The Duster as he leaned over the pommel and jockeyed an extra bit of speed out of the gelding.

"Kind of dry, that tinder," I said to Renney, at last.

He was looking the same way with me, but none too happy, I should've said.

"Aye," said he, "and he'll burn without any smoke, I hope, and last a long time."

"He will," I declared, though I wasn't at all sure. "Tell me, sheriff," said I, "how you come to know so much about women?"

"I don't," says he.

"You certainly seem to have Marguerite Lamont by heart," I argued. "I never heard any woman talked out better."

"Well," said Renney, with a sigh, "there's some of them that carry their title on their forehead. And besides, she used to smile at me once in a while, before The Duster came up like the sun and turned the other men black for her."

CHAPTER III.

WHAT COLOR WAS THIS SHEEP?

TO thine own self be true!" says some one.

A friend of mine says that is Shakespeare, though it sounds pretty Bible to me; but you never can tell the two apart. One sounds like a pulpit set up in the mountains, and the other sounds like the mountains brought into the pulpit.

Which I mean to say that whatever The Duster was, he was true to himself in the pinches, and that's about all that a man can ask of another, I suppose. For my part, I'd only ask a man to be honest about once a week, but when The Duster came charging up to the house of the minister like a tiger out of the jungle, we know what he did and said, because there was another man present.

Who? Why, the same man he had cheated, scoffed at, beaten, and then upheld in his church as if for the sake of sport. The girl's own father—the minister himself! Why did The Duster do that? For lack of shame? Or to show his own power over men and women? Well, I don't know, but my job is simply to set down the facts.

Beside the minister's shack, he pulled up the gelding on his two hind legs and hit the ground before two more were down. He went up to the front door and gave it a whang, and the voice of the minister bawled out and asked him in.

When he went in, there sat Lamont behind a deal table that served him as a desk. He was in shirt sleeves, his hair tousled up by his shoving his big

hands into it as he thought, and a scowl on his face as he drafted out next Sunday's sermon with an indelible pencil on cheap, rough paper. Which was as much as to say that he hoped his ideas would be immortal, but had his doubts. He had wetted the lead of his pencil from time to time while he worked, and the result was a round purple patch in the center of his mouth.

"What d'you want?" says Lamont, and then sees that it's The Duster himself, which must have made him come as close to trembling as a Scotchman can.

"I want to talk to you," says The Duster.

"Do you need a crutch for that?" says Lamont. "Or will that chair help you out enough?"

The Duster did not take the chair.

Instead, he stood behind it, with his hand resting on the top rung, and his hat in his hand, acting humble. But he never could really be humble. There was too much proud fire coldly lying in his eyes, all the time.

"I have come to tell you a story," says The Duster.

He gives a bow toward the kitchen door, where Marguerite shows herself, slim and white against the dimness of the rear room of the house. She had her sleeves tucked up over her round arms, and an apron tied around her, and in her hand there was a dish towel with which she was polishing up a glass. I imagine her standing there and glowing at The Duster like a star in the dusk of the day.

"And I should like to have your daughter hear it, also," says The Duster.

Lamont turned around in his chair so that it squawked like a puppy that has been stepped on.

"What have you to do with this?" says the minister, glowering at her.

"I don't know, daddy," says she, mild and meek as usual.

"Come in, then, and we'll soon find out," says the minister, and in she comes, too fascinated and shocked and delighted with the presence of The Duster to even remember to put down the towel and the glass, but from time to time giving it a rub; looking down at its brightness, or hesitantly up at The Duster as though his face were a dazzling light, or sadly and sweetly out the window where she saw not the green hills and the cows that grazed there, or the blue, deep sky beyond, but something else about which you and I know nothing at all.

"Now?" says Lamont, looking grimly back at The Duster.

He answered: "I wanted to tell you a story, sir."

"About what?" said Lamont.

"About a sheep, sir."

"If you have to put in the sheep, leave out the 'sir,'" said Lamont. "Now, what is it?"

"Once upon a time," said The Duster, "there was a sheep born with teeth like a wolf."

"Go on," said the minister. "I like the beginning of that story because it sounds like a confession."

"The truth always does," said The Duster, "because it comes as rarely as Sunday."

"Stuff!" said Lamont. "Go on with your yarn."

He gave his daughter a hard look, but got no more out of her than if he had looked at the zenith of the sky.

"This sheep," said The Duster, "one day got through a hole in a hedge, meaning no harm, and began to eat the neighbor's grass; and when the neighbor saw it, he sent out his dogs and they gave it a terrible run, but when it could run no longer, it turned around and fought, not with its head and its feet, but with its teeth. It killed a couple of the dogs and hurt two more of them so that they went howling home.

"After that, the sheep was so frightened by what it had done, and so delighted to be free, that it scampered on back to its home flock.

"But when it came through the hole in the hedge the other sheep smelled blood. At once they set up the cry of 'Wolf! Wolf!' and the rams ranged themselves on the outside of the flock, and the wethers behind them, and the little lambs inside them, and the bell-goat in the center of all, and they kept on shouting, 'Wolf! Wolf!' until the farmer came out with a gun and saw the red on the white thing by the hedge, and fired at it, and sent a slug through its body, and another slug through its face."

As he said this, The Duster paused in the making of a cigarette and absently touched his cheek, where there was a little white scar.

Then he went on:

"The poor sheep that was born with teeth—which was not his fault at all!—ran away as fast as he could, and would have been found and killed by the dogs of his own master, if it hadn't been for the coming of the evening. When he got off in the woods, he licked his wounds and wondered at the strangeness of the world, and stayed there, starving and wondering, until his wound was well.

"When he came out of the wood again, he found out that the simplest way to live was on the bodies of his fellows—that is to say, the other sheep whom he found, here and there, most of whom didn't have teeth, but a great many of them with very long wool. He collected enough fleece to keep him warm and sold the rest for food, and lived very well, and would have been extremely happy if he could have forgotten the warmth of the old nights when he slept in the fold with all the other sheep breathing and blinking around him. You understand how it is?"

"I don't understand a thing you're saying," said the minister, who was such a clever man that he didn't mind being stupid now and then.

The Duster turned slightly toward Marguerite and made a little bow, which was one of his ways.

"Do you understand me, Marguerite?" says he.

This sudden and grave appeal made her lift her hands—the glass and the dish towel with them—up to her breast.

"Yes," said she. "I mean to say, I think that I understand you perfectly, John."

"Is that his name?" roared the minister, suddenly frightened, and therefore, speaking very loudly.

She shrank back into her chair.

"Duster, I mean," said she, whispering.

The minister made a face, but he kept the words from coming out and sat up in his chair, scowling first at The Duster and then at his daughter. He changed color, too, and he had mighty good reason for that.

"Go on about this eternal sheep!" he commanded.

"Certainly, sir," said The Duster, appearing to like his humble rôle on this occasion. "The poor outcast sheep went——"

"The one with teeth, you mean?" asked the minister.

"Yes, sir."

"Drop the 'sirring' and get on!"

"The poor outcast sheep, sir," said The Duster gently, "went up and down the face of this earth, not sadly, but kicking up his heels and even bleating a little now and then, but still, as I was saying, remembering from time to time the sheepfold, like a safe little village, and the farmer's dogs, like the strength of the law, and the farmer himself like a powerful judge. Do you follow me, sir?"

The minister growled, but said nothing. He was too busy watching Mar-

guerite, who was sitting on the edge of her chair with the glass pressed against her breast like a diamond beyond price, and her eyes staring wildly at The Duster—and something more.

"This sheep," said The Duster, "that went wildly wandering up and down through the hills, taking what he wanted, going where he wished, laughing at the law, and at the little churches, and the men that pray there, and all such things—this same fellow, one day came back and looked over the rail of a fold—or a village, as you might say, wondering how many fleeces he could pick up there in his regular occupation."

"I suppose you mean that he was a robber?" said the minister harshly.

"That was his occupation," said The Duster very mildly, "and as the poet says, there's no harm in a man following his occupation, sir."

"What poet says that?" bellowed Lamont, getting red in the face.

"Shakespeare, sir," said The Duster.

Lamont was silenced. For even a minister will accept quotations out of Shakespeare, it appears, though I never could learn why.

"To go back to the poor lost sheep that looked into the village," went on The Duster, "he was used to seeing all sorts of people. There were men he had robbed in banks, and there were men he had robbed on trains; and there were men he had robbed at the card table, and men he had robbed on the highway. He was used to reading the minds of men through their faces. Except for ministers, whom he always found extremely difficult, sir."

"Confound you, you rascal!" said Lamont, and then coughed and glared at his daughter to warn her that she was looking like a frightened and enchanted goose.

But Marguerite did not heed him. She would not have heeded fire from Heaven, if it had suddenly poured down between her and the face of The Duster.

"Get to the point!" said Lamont abruptly.

"I shall, sir," said The Duster, "at once."

CHAPTER IV.

INTO THE FOLD.

YOU were looking over a fence into a village wondering whom you could rob, in the last sentence, if you want to find your place," said Lamont.

"The sheep was," said The Duster.

"The sheep? Bah!" muttered the minister.

"That was about what the sheep said," replied The Duster. "I don't want to conceal that he had grown rather hardened in spirit from walking the hills by day and night."

"Chiefly at night, I suspect?" sneered the minister.

"Exactly, sir, so that he was familiar with the stars," said The Duster. "And when he looked down into the crowd of the people in Christmas, he saw a great many good men and women, and some not so good; but most of them were concealed or dimmed by a mist that rises up from human faults and sins and sorrows, except on Sunday mornings, when, of course, you brush them all away with your good sermons, sir."

You see that The Duster had brought the scene around to twelve o'clock, as you might say, and struck a gong with his last words that echoed into the minister's heart, and certainly into the heart of Marguerite.

"Your sheep—your stars—your mists—I wish you'd get down to the facts of your case," said the minister.

"I hoped," said The Duster, more gently than ever, "that you would have some sympathy for this poor sheep."

"We'll tell in the conclusion," said the minister.

"That sounds more legal than Christian," said The Duster. "However, I

want you to know that the sheep had been out in the weather so long, and was so long unwashed by such things as good Sunday sermons, that he had weathered very dark. In fact, you might have called him a black sheep. But this black sheep, when he looked over the fence into the village at the people inside, and saw their faces, dim with sin and complacency, and wind, and 'good works,' and talk, and scandal, and gossip, and backbiting, and treachery, and envy, and hatred and petty cheating, and lies, and all the other things that go to make up the dust in a village street—among all these, so bright that it was like the stars he was so accustomed to see shining over the midnight hills, he saw one face always before him——"

He made a slight pause, and looked straight at Marguerite, and as he did so, the glass tumbled from her hand. She made a vague gesture to recapture it, but it crashed on the floor into a million pieces, and she sat there holding the dish towel against her breast like a cross, say, or a child.

The minister leaned in his chair and looked at his girl with despair and fear, but she did not regard him a whit. Her lips had parted. He could see her breathe, and with every breath the light waxed and waned in her eyes.

The Duster was looking straight at her, now, and for once in his life I suppose he was not acting, as he went on in such a voice as no man and no woman ever had heard from him before:

"She was so gentle, so good, so beautiful, that my heart stopped like the hands of a watch which will always point to a Sunday morning, and the church on Christmas Hill, and Marguerite."

The minister came to his feet with a lurch, like a steer that has worked free from the mud at the edge of a tank.

"What do you mean, Duster?" he cried. "What are you saying here?"

"I am simply telling you a story of a black sheep, who fell in love," said The Duster.

Her own name seemed to have frozen up speech in the girl, but at this, she uttered a little cry, and the poor dish towel fell from her, and she sat with her empty hands turned up, looking partly like a child and partly like a saint, which is exactly what she was.

"Do you love my girl?" said the minister.

"I do, sir," said The Duster.

The minister turned toward Marguerite, but when he looked at her, there was no need whatsoever of asking a question.

And all the labor, the disappointments, the pain, the loss of his good wife, the disgrace and disappearance of Tommy, his son, were probably less to him than the shock of seeing in the face of Marguerite that she did truly love this man. He was no fool, and if he knew anything in the world it was that his daughter would never love twice. She was the sort of a sword, you might say, that can cut through a mountain of steel, but it is only good for one stroke.

So Lamont stood there for a moment, swaying, gripping his big labor-roughened hands, and breathing harshly, like a man who has been running uphill.

All he could say for a moment was: "You've spoken in front of me. I want to remember that. You've spoken in front of me."

Now he rubbed his knuckles across his forehead.

"Marguerite?" he said at last.

Of course she heard the pain and the loss and the misery in his voice, and the fear which he felt for her sake, and the cherishing which he had given to her, like a father and like a mother, too. But, after all, there is one time in her

life when the best of women is strong enough to be cruel, and this moment had come to her. All she felt for her father made her voice low, but it was audible as the breath of life or the beating of a heart.

"Ah, daddy," said she, "may I have him?"

Those words I have turned in my mind a great many times, and I would not change them. It was like a child asking for a toy.

The minister, like a man fatally hurt but still marching in the ranks, went straight on to do the duty that lay in front of him.

"I have no right to give you or to keep you, dear," said he. "You love The Duster——"

He had to pause, there, and fight with himself for a minute. For I suppose the very name "Duster" brought up into his mind his own struggle against this man, his defeat, the disgrace of that burial of a heathen outlaw in the sacred ground of his cemetery, and all the killings and lesser crimes which were counted into the record of John Thurlow.

However, he was able to go on again presently, and say: "And all that I can do is to try to see that your future will be fairly safe in the hands of your husband. I think that I should try to do that, Marguerite."

Even if she had been able to find breath for an answer, I suppose she would not have had any words. So she slipped from her chair for the first time, and going to Lamont, she stood beside him, looking up into his face with trembling lips and never daring to venture a second glance toward The Duster.

Lamont put his arm around her and pressed her closely to him, as though he were saying farewell to her forever. And, in a sense, I suppose he really was.

He started to say: "Duster," but caught himself, and instead began: "John, I have to ask a guarantee from you?"

"Yes," said The Duster.

"You can give it or not," said Lamont. "Certainly, I haven't any right or power to demand it from you. But I think we all three must try to forget that black sheep which had been wandering on the hills, as you were saying a little while ago. We ought to forget him and consider that this fellow who walked into Christmas town is a new man. He has no past. His name is John P. Thurlow. He does not talk about the things that he has been; but he tells me that he will not spend on my daughter a single penny that he has —won—before to-day. And in the future, he will keep his hands clean. No stolen money out of the past, Duster," he broke out with a great voice. "For both your sakes, dress her cleanly, even if it has to be in rags!"

The Duster made a start and drew himself up. He raised his hand and his face, but Lamont rudely knocked them down.

"Don't swear!" said he.

The Duster gasped—even The Duster!

"Don't swear!" said the minister. And he added his one really bitter speech that day: "You'll have to prove yourself worthy by time, before your oaths are worth considering. But give me your hand on it, as one gentleman to another."

You could abash a mountain sheep on a high rock almost as soon as The Duster, but he was abashed now. All he could do was to silently take the hand of Lamont.

And that poor man took his daughter in his arms, and kissed her two or three times, saying over her in a muttering voice: "My darling, my darling! Oh, my darling!"

Then he gave her to The Duster with his own hands.

CHAPTER V.

SHADOW ON THE WALL.

WHEN The Duster came home, it was late in the day. The sun had gone down, coolness had fallen on us out of the sky, the stars began to step out thin and small in the east, and a good fresh wind came and blew the smoke and steam of the cookery out of my face.

I was making a Mulligan stew. That may make you think of gristle, lean shoulder meat, and a few rib bones with strips of fat sticking to them, a scattering of stale vegetables with the life cooked out of them, and all the moldy old bread in the bread can dropped in to give the thing substance. But I mean real Mulligan, than which there's nothing better. I mean a good young chicken that's fat to the ridge of the back and larded with fat; a chunk of pork with the salt soaked and then parboiled out of it; and these two cooked together, while you cook quickly in separate pans, your carrots, and tinned beans, and tomatoes, and a smell of garlic, say, to make the taste all stick together.

Now, I had just put all the vegetables into the main pot, telling myself that if The Duster came home late he could have cold stew and go hang, because I was ready to eat just then; but as I was lifting the pot off the fire to the back of the stove, I heard the hammering hoofs of his horse rush in under the trees and slide to a stop in front of the house.

"Good news," says I to myself, "good news—for The Duster!"

For thinking of the pretty, kind face of the girl suddenly wiped the smile off my face.

He came striding in, throwing his hat into one corner and his quirt into another, and looking, as usual, three inches and thirty pounds bigger than the truth about him, which I once had carried senseless in my arms across that same room and laid on the bunk.

"It's done, Baldy," says he.

"It is," says I, "and it's chicken Mulligan, and a lot too good for the likes of you. Smell it?"

He sniffed. Mostly he always did what I told him to about little things that didn't count.

"It's done," says he again.

I looked at him. His face was shining like the face of a boy on Christmas morning.

"Aye, and not overdone," said I, "which is lucky for you that you came home just now. Pull up a couple of chairs to the table and cut a coupla slices of bread from that loaf. Home-made, mind you! I baked it this morning at three hundred in the shade. Which I ain't training for high temperatures, either, like you ought to."

The Duster slashed off a couple of slices from the loaf, absent-mindedly. But instead of sitting, he began to perambulate up and down the room.

He picked up the quirt and hung it on a nail. He took it down again and slashed the air.

"How fast are you going, Duster?" says I. "I hope you get there in time for supper. Did you hear me say that this is chicken Mulligan?"

"Baldy," he says for the third time, "it's done, I tell you!"

"Aye," says I, "and that's what I'm trying to get off my mind, and put the Mulligan on. Sit down."

Still he didn't sit down.

He came and leaned over, his hands gripping the back of the chair opposite me, low down, so that his eyes were not high above mine.

"Do you think that it won't pan out, Baldy?" he asked me.

I stopped eating, although the Mulligan was prime. The Duster, the great Duster, was talking to me like any young fool in love. He was asking my advice!

"Hey?" says I, fighting for time.

"Do you think it won't go?" said he.

"By the soft eyes of her," says I, "I knew it was a marriage the first time she seen you."

He frowned a little, but his mind slid over my mean remark and went back to his subject.

"You think that we have a chance, Baldy? You sent me to her, you remember?"

"The sheriff done that," said I. "Because he figured you had to get punished outside of jail."

"You don't really mean what you say," said The Duster, with a sigh. "I wish you'd talk seriously to me, Baldy. You think we have a chance for happiness together?"

"Sure," said I. "Part of the time you'll have a fine time together, the pair of you."

"Part of the time?" says he. "Which part?"

"The part when you're out of prison," said I.

He tried to laugh, but only squawked.

"Sit down," said I. "Before the grease gets up to the top of the stew."

He poured out a cup of coffee, burned himself with it, and went on pacing the room without swearing, merely licking his blistered lips.

"I love her," says The Duster, like a man running under double wraps, and speaking softly. "I love her!"

"I love the Mulligan," says I, "and thank my stars I didn't forget to put in the garlic! Sit down, Duster, and don't act like a crazy man!"

"Ah, Baldy," says he, "what a grand thing it is for a girl or a boy to have a father—a good man—a brave, simple, strong, good man like Lamont!"

"Him that you made such a fool of?" I reminded him.

"Heaven forgive me!" says The Duster, just like that.

I got pretty nearly scared when I heard him, it was so unlike his old self.

"Are you gunna cry about it?" says I.

"I love her," says The Duster, as though it was something new for me to hear.

"I'd as soon you wrote me a letter," says I. "I'm not going to marry her."

"Gentle, sweet, and pure!" says The Duster.

"Pass me the coffeepot," says I, "and mind you don't let the lid fall off. I've been figuring on mending it, if you'd ever remember to get me a soldering stick, when you're downtown."

"My sweet girl!" said he. "Heaven help me to take care of her; and keep me straight—and keep me straight!"

"I heard you before," said I, "but it's not my ground that you're sinking the rise in. How did Lamont take this punch."

"Like a man," said The Duster. "Like a good man and a true father."

"He's a glutton for punishment," said I. "He's an iron man, and if he could give the way he takes, he'd been the champion of the world. While you're up, will you put a stick of wood in the stove? I forgot the fire for the dishwater."

Of course he paid no attention to me. He didn't even get angry, which I would have liked; but, at any rate, I'd stopped him talking if I couldn't stop him pacing, and I went moodily on with supper, forgetting the good taste of the Mulligan, even, and eating more than I wanted of it, at that, and nearly breaking my teeth on the edge of the coffee cup. I was worried for that poor Margie!

At last he cut in again with: "I'll be able to do it. I'll get work. I'll stick to it. I'll never go back!"

That made me mad. He was praying out loud, as you might say.

"Sure," said I, "you'd be all right if things were a little changed."

He came hurrying over once more and planted himself where he could watch my eyes when I answered.

"Changed in what way?" he asked.

"If all the week was made up of Mondays, I mean," said I.

"You think that I'll weaken, and quit work, and slide back to the easy ways of making money," said he. "But you're wrong, Baldy. You know me only in part. I don't know myself. This day something is added to me!"

"Sure," said I. "You'll soon have a new cook that'll work without wages, but you'll still have to buy the Mulligan for two. Have you got the makings?"

He gave them to me with a sigh, still looking hard ahead into his future.

I built myself a cigarette, and though I felt pretty hard, I managed to keep from tearing the paper.

"Have you told her about the three hundred thousand that you start on for capital, and the field where it grew, and the color of the flowers when it bloomed?" I asked him.

"It's gone," said he. "I'll give it all away. Not to that cur of a Muncie, perhaps. But to some worthy charity and——"

His voice trailed away, as though he were trying to find the right spot to drop that lump of money. Of course I had forgotten my lighted match, by this time, and it burned the tips of my fingers before I was able to drop it and say: "Give it away—— Worthy char —— Listen to me, Duster! Do I look worthy to you?"

He smiled down at me in a sort of quiet, fond way.

"Ah, Baldy," said he, "as if you'd take the stuff—the stolen stuff, I mean. Old man, I'd trade everything I have for the sake of your honesty! Then I'd know that our home was founded on rock."

"If you were like me," said I, "your home wouldn't be much more than a rock, for sure. And if——"

Now, as I said this, I saw The Duster straighten with a twitch-back of his shoulders, and I knew that he was looking at some one who had silently entered the room.

I turned my head and there I saw a thing I wish never had dawned upon my eyes.

He had stepped lightly in, and instantly to the side, so that he would have solid wall behind him, and not space through which gun muzzles could be poked into his spinal column. His face was the same as I remembered it —muddy white, like the belly of a catfish. A face that did you no good to see.

And when I saw him now, I let out a sort of a choked screech that hurt my throat, for I was looking at the ashes that The Duster had buried so carefully up there on Christmas Hill. I mean, I was looking at the man whose ashes those were supposed to be, for there in the room with us, casting his shadow on the wall, was Hector Manness!

CHAPTER VI.

DARKER THAN USUAL.

CHOKE that old fool," said Manness, "before he wakes up the entire town, crowing as if the day were here!"

"No," said The Duster, "as a matter of fact, the night seems a little darker than usual."

Manness merely smiled, and replied: "There's the same old light touch! I'm glad to see that you haven't lost it, Duster. Cuts a man's throat so that he hardly knows he's lost his life until he tries to draw the next breath. Shall I sit down?"

"Not in here," said The Duster. "If you sit down in here, think how much you'd be in the lamplight, Hector? The limelight, as one might say. And so many people anxious to see you—dead or alive!"

Once more Manness smiled, and I never saw a smile that failed to improve any face as completely as that failed with Manness. I had heard so much

about this man and had even seen him before, that I couldn't help knowing about his loathsome career in the past; but I didn't have to know about it. I could see it all printed in the brain and the flesh of that sick-looking scoundrel. He was a little frightened, now, by what The Duster had said. And he didn't make any effort to cover up his fear, but let it glisten in his eyes and jerk at his lips. Still, he was also pleased; as though by having been called the "chief" monster.

"They don't love me, Duster," said he, "and it looks as though your friend, there, didn't love me, either. That's a grief to me."

"Aye," says The Duster. "When they catch you, they won't acquit you. They'll take your nine lives all at once. They'd take ninety, if you had 'em!"

"Are you proud," said Manness, "because the fools have let you off five times when they should have hanged you? Or are you trying to frighten me? And to wind up with, are we going to keep on talking in the presence of that superannuated eavesdropper there?"

Now, a man can take so much, but no more, and though I had no more chance with that magical hand of Manness than I did with The Duster, still, I felt that I had to take a stand here and now. So I said to him: "Manness, you've spoken of me twice as though I were a dog. The next time, I'll have my teeth in you."

Manness looked me up and down.

"Do you know who you're talking to, Wye?" said he.

"I know fairly well," said I. "I don't know all about you, but I know some samples of the sneaking murders, and stabbings in the back, and throats cut at night, and such like things that you've done. They ought to hunt you with a snake charmer!"

Somewhere it had been floating around in my mind that Manness had one vulnerable spot, and that he went almost crazy when he was insulted by being compared to a snake. I think there was a story of a fellow in Butte who had made that mistake, and the yarn went on that, in revenge, this Manness had actually got hold of him and dumped him into a snake cave, and then stood by while the poor wretch came lurching out, squirted full of venom from fifty bites, and watched him yell and twist and die there in the Montana sun. That's pretty horrible, but I've heard it vouched for by honest men; and certainly when you looked at Manness, and his sinuous leanness, and his unearthly, bright, unwinking little eyes, you could see why he'd resent the comparison. When he heard me speak now, he fairly turned blue around the lips, and his right hand flicked inside his coat so fast that I couldn't have brought my gun out of the holster in time to stop him.

The Duster could, however, and with a flash of his hand, he covered Manness there by the door.

"I'll let a streak of light clean through you, Manness," said he, "if you shove a gun at Wye!"

Manness kept his hand inside his coat for an instant, while he rolled his look from me toward my protector. I thought that he would take a chance with both of us, but that idea couldn't have lasted a tenth of a second with him.

He brought out his hand with—a sack of tobacco and a package of brown papers between the tips of the slim fingers.

"You talk like a fool, Duster," said he. "You never had any real sense of humor. I wanted to see what sort of nerve your crook had—and I see that he hasn't got much!"

I might as well be frank. I was scared into the shakes, true enough, but The Duster was kind enough not to look at me.

"You'd give anybody the horrors,"

said he. "Nobody feels at home with a Gila monster."

It made my hair rise to hear that. For two reasons. The Duster had put his gun away, so that he stood on even terms with Manness at that moment, and this meant that a fight was as likely as not. It meant, furthermore, that The Duster was inviting trouble, and whatever else men said about Manness, no one ever had doubted his courage, any more than they doubt that of a lion.

But whether it was policy or fear of his master, he did not choose to accept the challenge at this moment but merely smiled—which was no more than a flash of white teeth.

"You've never grown out of your school days," says Manness. "Forever drawing a line and putting a chip on your shoulder. Stop being a child, because I want to talk with you."

"Fire away," says The Duster coldly.

"Alone," said Manness.

"But there's the point. I don't know that I care to talk to you alone."

"Are you afraid to?" says Manness, leering at him.

"I'm busy," said The Duster.

"Thinking of Marguerite, I suppose?"

I thought The Duster would strike a slug into him at that. He hung on the trembling verge of it, at least, but then controlled himself with a big effort. I wonder how Manness could have learned of that affair so soon? For he seemed to know everything.

"As a matter of fact," said Manness, "that's what brought me here. I wanted to make that marriage more possible for you, Duster, if you'll believe me."

"I believe that you never wanted to do anything to any man's advantage," declared The Duster. "I'm not going to talk to you, Manness. You've broken a promise in coming back here."

"Ah, yes," says Manness. "But you know that man only proposes, Duster. The luck was horribly against me. However, I'll prove that you ought to send that gray-headed old man out of the place while we have a chat. I want to suggest that before you can safely marry her you'll have to remove a few obstacles. You'll surely see that."

"Obstacles?" said The Duster, lifting his eyebrows.

"The worst kind."

"Such as what?"

"Why, obstacles that may come up in her own mind, d'you see?"

"I don't know what you mean, Manness."

"You'd better, though."

"You're lying, as usual," said The Duster in final decision. "You know nothing about the affair at all."

"Don't I? No, you know that I'm telling you the truth."

"How could you know about her? No more than the night could know about the day, Manness."

He said it with open disgust and scorn, but Manness answered: "You have to remember that the devil has more ears than any one else. But make your choice. One way or the other. I'm offering you your chance, Duster!"

He stepped a little toward the door, full of anger and hate—the only two emotions that could be natural to the beast.

I saw The Duster waver and then fall from his high ground.

"Baldy," he said to me, "let me have a minute alone with Manness, will you? You haven't watered the horses this evening, anyway."

Manness sneered at me as he won his first victory, but I said to The Duster: "Good luck, old man! Remember that if he so much as scratches you, you're finished, because he's sure to have poison on the end of his knife."

I thought that idea made some impression on The Duster; it certainly made Manness jerk as though I'd hit him with a whip. But then I had to leave the room, mighty unwillingly, be-

cause the things that Manness couldn't talk about in front of me were not likely to be the things that would do The Duster any good hearing them alone.

I went out, but I didn't water the horses. I wouldn't have missed that conversation for any price.

All I did was to walk straight out in the path of the lamplight toward the barn, and then, stepping out of the light, I yanked off my boots and came back like a flash to the house and slid in under it. I mean, the old shack was raised on stilts from the ground to keep it from molding floors in the rainy season. It was boarded up with a skirting originally, but this skirting had rotted or been torn away, and the result was that there were big gaps through which I could easily work.

I got under, therefore, and lay down close beneath a big knot-hole through which the dim lamplight fell down and showed me a beetle struggling along with some sort of a burden.

After I got there, for a second, I heard Manness say that he would take a look to see whether I'd really gone, and heard footfalls cross the floor.

They stepped out onto the ground in front of the door, and I actually saw that pale wretch crouch and look under the house. He remained there for ten seconds. The only reason I didn't pull a gun and shoot him in self-defense was that I was actually too frightened to move a hand. I thought I saw him spot me and reach for a gun, but in another moment he straightened up and stepped inside the house again.

"That's the trouble with good men, Duster," said he. "No matter how honest they may be, they haven't the courage to do what they want to do. Look at this fellow, Baldy Wye. He wanted to protect you from me, by keeping near enough to listen; but he didn't love you as much as he feared me, and he's slipped off there to get rid of the trouble and wash his hands of you, while he waters the horses!"

He laughed, and I hated him, and was shamed, and then foolishly proud as a boy to realize that even old Baldy Wye had slipped one over on Hector Manness.

Just after that there was a pause, in which I heard the galloping of horses on the road, and the rattle of voices of young fellows, bawling out to one another as they went. I was afraid that noise had blotted out some of the conversation from above me, but it hadn't. And the first thing that The Duster said I heard as plainly as though I had been in the room.

He said: "I don't need the help of Baldy Wye or any other man. I can take care of myself with you; I always could, and I always can."

"On the contrary," said Manness, "you're absolutely in my hands!"

CHAPTER VII.

A GONE GOOSE.

WHEN I was a boy, I remember that my mother told me there was no fool as great as the man who ever believed a proved liar, but still, as I lay there under the floor, I couldn't help believing Manness. For there was a ring and a thrill in his tone. Acting sometimes passes for the truth, but this sounded like the dropping of a pure golden coin.

"In your hands?" said The Duster. "No, no, Hector, I'm out of them for the first time in these years. I'm out of them, and I'll never come into them again."

"We'll see. We're going to talk the thing out, aren't we?"

"I suppose so, but let's be quick about it, Hector. You're as pleasant a sight to my eyes as——"

"As that Gila monster you were speaking of a minute ago?" suggested Manness briskly.

"Put it however you please. Let's be ended. I told you that the Muncie bank was the last job I'd work with you on. I meant it. The job is finished. I had your solemn word of honor that you'd never trouble me again when the work was done. And you know, Manness, that I didn't want to tackle that affair. The fact is that I was through before it started. You begged me to come in. You swore it was the last time you'd borrow my help. And like a fool I believed you!"

He stopped for an answer, and, to my surprise, Manness did not attempt to make one. He allowed The Duster to begin again, and the latter immediately continued:

"I was sick of you and your ways and your works a long time before, and I told you so. Is that true?"

"It's true, Duster," answered Manness—not submissively, but as though he had to admit the truth.

"I would have broken with you then," said The Duster, "but I didn't want to leave you in the lurch. They were cornering you. The whole country hated you like a plague. You had no friends, and no place where you could turn. You knew you were done for. Once caught, there was no chance for you. They would hang you with joy. No juryman would dare to vote in your favor for fear of being lynched after the trial was over! I had made up my mind to quit you and, therefore, I wanted to see you safe first of all. So I proposed that I should try this huge hoax that I've worked in Christmas. I'd come here and try to bury your ashes in the churchyard—the ashes of Hector Manness! That would prove that you were dead. And when luck brought us on the old Apache Trail to that thigh bone with the imbedded bullet, like your own, of course you remember that it clinched the purpose in my mind. I would come up here and prove to the world that you were dead by fighting to bury your ashes in consecrated earth. So I did it, didn't I?"

"You certainly did," said Manness, as before giving away every chance to dispute.

"And the scheme worked, didn't it?"

"It did. Every paper in the country carried articles about my demise!"

He laughed, snarlingly, as he said this.

"Yes," went on The Duster, "they carried the articles. Up to that time the police along every border, and at every shipping port, had been on the lookout for you. They were keen as hawks about you. But now they know that you're dead, and the way is open. You can get out anywhere, with hardly a chance of them finding you. People don't recognize dead men in living ones! A change of complexion would have been enough disguise for you!"

"That's still true," said Manness.

"Aye," said The Duster, "but before I did this, I made you swear that we were done as partners. Heaven knows why I ever worked with you at all—unless it was as Baldy Wye suggested just now, that I wanted to see if I could be a snake charmer!"

It was as bad an insult as you could imagine, but still that fellow Manness swallowed it without a murmur.

"And after I had done the work, you came back and begged me to help you to one last stake. You'd gambled the other stuff away. If I would help you on the Muncie haul, you'd clear out and never bother me again. Well, I agreed to that. To rob Muncie was simply stealing from a thief; that wouldn't be on my conscience hardly. So I did it. And again you swore, when we parted—I with a slash along my ribs that might some day send me to the penitentiary—that you wouldn't dare show yourself over the edge of my sky line so long as you lived. Is that correct?"

"All perfectly correct."

"Then what under the sky gives you

the brassy nerve to come here to-night and trouble me again?"

"Luck!" said Manness, with an odd quietness. "Bad luck. I've been cleaned out again, Duster."

"Bah! What's that to me?"

"You were always a charitable fellow. You never turned down an old partner."

"I'll stake you to a ticket out, if that's what you mean."

"I do. A half-million-dollar ticket out."

"Explain, Hector."

"It's the simplest game I ever saw. After Muncie's safe was cracked, every last one of his depositors—and you know he had some big ones—has transferred to the First National right here in the town of Christmas."

The Duster stamped on the floor, and I saw a thin shower of dust fall down through the knot hole above my face.

"You want me to help you crack that job?" he asked. "Why, man, you know my principles! I don't mind relieving some fellow with a fat purse of some of the stuff that lines it. But the First National here has the accounts of all the little one-horse farmers; and the old broken-down cow-punchers and prospectors have loaded their last savings into it. The old-timers have planted in that bank their funeral funds. You want me to lift money like that?"

He changed his tone: "Manness, how did you lose what you got on the Muncie split?"

"The yellow crooks in the stock market!" snarled Manness. "The sly, sneaking, smooth-speaking, lying, hypocritical, back-stabbing crooks in the stock market! I had a sure thing outlined. I would have turned that three hundred thousand into three million sure—ten million in three months, if I had any breaks in the game at all. I had something surer than wire-tapping. But the yellow dogs gave me away, and the three hundred thousand slipped with that chance. Curse them! I'll have some of them for it. I'll have some of them, Duster, in a way they'll remember!"

"Snakes?" said The Duster.

I heard a gasp of rage and controlled fury from Manness.

"Will you listen to this job I have lined up?" he asked.

"Not to a word of it."

"I've got Pemberton willing to work with us and let us in on the ground floor. He asks fifty thousand flat, and that's every penny we'd have to put out!"

I remembered Pemberton's round, rosy face, and honest smile, and kind, dim gray eyes. Well, I could hardly believe that he had sold out his employers in that bank. We'd been saying for years what an asset an honest man like Pemberton was to the Christmas First National. Men used to put their accounts in that bank simply because they liked to see the good fat smile of Pemberton, fat as a walrus' cheek.

"Not if he'd sell out for five cents. It doesn't interest me, Manness, and there's an end. I'd rather rob my grandmother than such a bank as the First National here!"

"Well, Duster, you have no choice," said Manness. "I've got to have you in. And you belong to me for this last job!"

I waited.

Then The Duster said: "Tell me how I'm in your hand, Hector?"

"This way. Before I came to see you to-day, I wrote a letter to the editor of the little paper here in Christmas. I told 'em frankly—for their own good, you know—that their sheriff was a simpleton and that the whole town was fat-witted. I pointed out how you have come here, buried some random bones and wood ashes that you called my remains, got yourself the confidence of the town, and after robbing the Muncie bank with me, you've become engaged

to the nicest girl in the town and intend to live on the coin you've stolen."

"You didn't mail that letter, Hector?"

"Of course not. I left it in the hands of a friend, to be mailed within three days, unless I return. I had in mind that you might murder me, of course, if you were not feeling logical minded, this evening."

"Interesting idea," says The Duster, and even I could tell that he was shaken to the ground. "Not a scrap of proof for either of the things you say!"

"My signature will prove that I'm alive. That signature's pretty well known, Duster. And for second proof, they can find a brand-new, half-healed scar of a bullet wound raking across your left side."

No one spoke for some time, and my aching ears could hear the voice of the little alarm clock begin to break out into the silence, making a sort of irregular pulse, as though it were slowing to a stop, and seeming to falter on with a greater and greater difficulty.

At last I heard The Duster say:

"I'll tell you, Manness. I have my share of the Muncie split without a penny gone from it. You can have that!"

"You fool," cried Manness, really breaking out for the first time, "there's a million and a half for the taking in the First National! It's got deposit boxes bulging, to say nothing of cash, besides! Dang your share of the Muncie split! I want you in this with me!"

I heard The Duster breathing like a broken-winded horse.

"Hector," said he, "you've got the thing all lined out safely. Why not go ahead? Then you won't have to make any split with me."

"I had the Muncie business all lined out, too," said Manness. "But what happened? The double-crossing cur of a cashier sold me, and I would be under the sod right now if I hadn't had your fancy gun-work to blow a hole in the trap for me! No, no, Duster, when I walk into the First National vault, I'll have you beside me, in the good old way!"

"Why don't I kill you?" says The Duster softly, thoughtfully.

That villain Manness answered as quick as you please: "Because the girl's worth murder or perjury. I looked in on her the other night. I wondered how she could have you so paralyzed. But even I could understand. She even made me, Duster, want to settle down. Do the job with me, Duster. Then ride ten miles across country to the place where I've left that letter to the paper. Take it into your own hands. Read it. Burn it. And then I'm gone out of your life for good! You marry the girl. You're rich, and can lead a beautiful life——"

I didn't wait to hear any more argument, or the answer, but started to crawl out from under the house, because I knew that The Duster was a gone goose.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SHERIFF'S CABBAGES.

AFTER I got out into the night, safely away from the wickedness that was in that little shack of a house, I remembered that the horses were to be watered, and I went slowly out to the barn. Dolly threw up her head and nickered at me as I shoved back the sliding door, and somehow the sight of her fine head thrown up so high and the faint flash of her big eyes made me feel worse than ever.

Because it made me think of the difference between men and horses—horses that will run for you till they die, and men that you never can trust. I went to Dolly and untied her halter rope and that of the gelding and led them out to the watering trough. I had pumped it brimful that same evening, so that it took a good bright section of

the stars on its face, and even when it had been ruffled by the thrust of the muzzles of the horses—Dolly always gets in above the nose—there were still little specks of fire in the far corners.

I watched those horses drink until a coyote sang off a hilltop behind the town, and the two big heads jerked up, and the ears pricked, and they stamped as if they were frightened to death. They were only playing a game of pretend, because they knew they were as safe as could be, but when I spoke to them—being between the pair—they turned their heads over and drooled water confidingly all over me. Then they drank again, and I wondered over them a little, and wished that the way of a man in life could be as simple and straight as the way of a horse. But when I raised my head, I could look through the trees to the light that shone out of the window of the house toward me; and inside that room I knew that Manness was completing his plan with The Duster.

A fine sight, that light through the night, turning around side of a big tree all faintly green, like a mist. But it made me feel worse still, because I knew that I really loved the poor Duster, and that most certainly I was going to betray him before the morning came!

I didn't want to. I told myself that no matter what happened, I would never do it. But I knew all the time that I would have to, almost like the fellow who tells himself when he leaves the ranch that this time he won't touch a drop when he gets to town. Because that fellow never can get past the first swinging door!

I watered the horses and put them up, and fiddled around, shoveling hay down into the manger. And then I waited a while at the door of the barn, but no matter how much time I killed, I knew that I would have to go to the sheriff.

Because when The Duster said that the First National was loaded with small accounts, I knew that he was only speaking the truest kind of truth. In fact, I knew twenty of the men and women who had those accounts, and the least of them was worth saving.

The Duster had no right to be considered. I argued that out in detail. It was true that I was fond of him. It might even be true that after this one job he would go straight. But his one happiness could not be balanced against the happiness of the scores of people who would be about ruined if the First National went bust.

I thought of them and their faces. And then I thought of Marguerite Lamont and her face, and I can tell you that I felt sick and faint.

However, just as I had known that I would do in the first place, I found that my feet were going down the street toward the sheriff's house, and pretty soon I arrived at it.

There was no more miserable little shanty in Christmas, where you could find plenty of the poorest in every section of the town, even on the top of the hill, near where Lamont's church stood.

Well, I went up to the little house and there was Renney sitting in the doorway smoking away at his pipe. He must have had the eyes of a cat, because there was no light streaming out from the house, and yet he knew me at once.

"Hello, Baldy," says he.

"Hello, Renney," says I. "How are things?"

"Pretty good with me, but kind of failing with the cabbages," says the sheriff.

"What cabbages?" says I.

"Them that I planted out behind the house," says he.

"You got a patch?" I asked, feeling glad that the talk could float along for a while without coming to the point that I would have to make before very long.

"Yeah. I planted 'em out all according to directions. I got them started. I used to sit out there and watch those dog-gone cabbages growing. I used to tell myself how much they'd sell for, and they'd keep me in cabbage soup for half the year, and leave enough of them over for me to sell a right smart lot and get me a new bridle, which I sure been needing for a long spell. I used to wake up in the night and smell those cabbages out there. I used to get up and stand at the window and watch them waiting there all in line, looking like silver in the moonlight.

" 'It's all right, Renney,' I used to tell myself. 'Those cabbages are sure doing fine.'

"Then I'd go back to sleep."

"Well, what happened, sheriff?"

"There comes along an evening when I notice some white moths fluttering around out there. I didn't mind. If they liked the smell of those cabbages, they was free to inhale the bouquet of 'em, as far as I was concerned, because I believe in a liberal policy, even where it comes to moths. But the trouble was that the moths had other ideas than perfume. Pretty soon, I begin to notice that there is holes appearing in the big, broad, tender new leaves of the cabbages. Like they had been burned through with a sunglass!

" 'Too bad!' says I. 'And I must look into this.'

"But about that time I'm called away on a trip, and when I come back here, those cabbages of mine look like they'd been used for transfers on a street-car line, they're so punched full of holes. And I know that the moths and their younglings had turned the trick against me. So about all that's left of my cabbage patch is the smell, Baldy, as you can tell for yourself!"

"Yes," says I, "I sure can smell it."

"But as for the sight," says he, "I hate to light a lamp in my house lately, because when the light streams out the window it shows me my new bridle all chewed to pieces, and my cabbage soup gone sour. Why don't you set down and have a smoke?"

"I ain't here for long," says I. "I come to talk to you about something."

"Well," said Renney, "I've wanted to talk to you about something, too. How did The Duster come out with Marguerite Lamont? That's what I want to ask."

"I dunno. I should suspect pretty well."

"I'm glad of it," says the sheriff. "That man has been so bad that the other side of the leaf is pretty sure to be worth reading. I used to wonder that a straight shooter like you, Baldy, would work for such a thug as The Duster, but since I've studied him some more and worked over his case, why it seems to me that in a lot of ways The Duster is a straight shooter himself."

"Does it?" said I, surprised.

"You bet! The Duster, now, is a fellow who never would double cross a friend, no matter what the friend did!"

That remark hit me pretty hard, and I stood mulling it over in my mind for a time.

"Sheriff," said I, "the fact is that I want to talk to you about something that The Duster has in mind to do."

"Yes?" says he. "Did The Duster ask you to come down here and talk to me about it? Because," he added, "I figured that we were pretty near friends enough, now, for him to come and talk to me on his own hook."

"He's friendly enough to you," said I, "but the fact is that he's being dragged into a—a——"

The sheriff waited a second and then said:

"Sometimes it's hard to get hold of the right word, ain't it? I remember that my father used to say that words that came hard sometimes weren't the right ones to speak, after all."

"What d'you mean?" said I.

"Why, nothing," said the sheriff. "How did you leave The Duster?"

"I left him on a high place, walkin' a tight rope," said I.

"So you came for help?"

"In a way, yes."

"Well, a fellow like The Duster is best left alone, in a pinch."

"Sheriff," I said desperately. "The fact is that The Duster is going to——"

The sheriff was taken with a fit of coughing, and then sneezed, and then cleared his throat loudly.

When he got through with that fit of noise, he seemed to have forgotten that I was talking, and only remembered that The Duster was the theme of it.

"Poor old Duster!" said he. "He's had his hard times—and his good ones. But he's going to have better luck in the long run, I figure, when he's married to Marguerite Lamont. He's a strong man, but she's a stronger woman."

"Stronger than The Duster?" I gasped.

"Aye. She'd die for the right—or for her brothers—or her father—to say nothin' of the man that she picks out to love. The Duster's brave. But she's fearless. He could face death, but she could laugh at it. Oh, yes, she'll be the stronger of the pair, and when the end of the day comes The Duster won't say: 'What have I been doing to-day?' but simply: 'Have I pleased my wife?'"

He finished off, chuckling.

"Does The Duster deserve her?" I asked.

"Who deserves to be followed by as much as a good dog?" said the sheriff, dodging me. "But then, The Duster has his points. As I was saying, he's a man that never would double cross his friends!"

I wondered at the way that Renney kept coming back to that point. And then it suddenly broke in on me. He knew perfectly well why I had come down there at that time of the night to see him. I had something to say that might wreck The Duster. I had something to say that might give Renney all the glory of capturing and showing up The Duster in the middle of a crime. It would make Renney a famous man—a great man all over the West. It would be the very thing that he had given years of his life to accomplish.

But here he was heading me off with all my information!

Then I remembered what I had heard him say, that he would rather turn one man straight than put twenty crooks in jail. And at last I knew that he really meant it. He was simply a man above my head. I felt like a kid.

"Renney," said I, "I'd better go home to bed and sleep on it."

"I reckon it's getting late," says he, very kindly. "Good night, Baldy."

And he shook hands with me, and I went off in a sort of a haze.

CHAPTER IX.

BALDY SEES A LIGHT.

WHEN I got back to the Ridley house, feeling still pretty dizzy, I found the lights were out, and that relieved me a good deal, because I thought The Duster probably had gone to bed and to sleep as soon as I left. I stepped into the house lightly, for fear that I might waken him, and slipped over to my bed as quiet as a mouse; but when I got there, I knew that there was something behind me, and I was hardly surprised when I heard the voice of The Duster say:

"Baldy!"

I turned around. Jumped around, I should say. And there in the gloom near the outside door I saw The Duster. That man could move as quietly as a ghost, and it was no wonder that he had been able to get between me and the door, if he cared to.

"Baldy," said he, "where have you been?"

"I went out for a walk," says I.

"Usually you don't walk as late as this," said The Duster.

"Usually," I answered, "I'm not kicked out to go and amuse myself watering the horses, and such things."

"Where did you go?" said he.

"I walked down the hill into the valley," I answered him. "Why d'you ask?"

I was beginning to get worried. Still, I could feel pretty sure that he hadn't been able to follow me to the sheriff's house. Just the same, I was worried, because the thing that you usually expected The Duster couldn't do was usually the thing that he was sure to manage.

He scratched a match and lighted a lamp.

"I'd like to talk to you a while," said he.

"Sure," says I, and sat down on the edge of my bunk, yawning a good deal, so as to cover up the scared look that I knew was on my face.

"I wanted to make sure," said The Duster, "that there was one man in the world so extremely honest that I could trust him, but I see that I have been wrong."

"Who?" said I. "You don't mean Manness, I expect?"

He did not laugh. He merely looked me coldly in the face.

"There's no red dust down the hill to the valley," he pointed out.

I looked down at my trousers and saw the dust on them pretty clearly, though how he could tell the color by the lamplight beat me.

"What of it?" said I. "I took a little walk into the town on my way back home."

"You did?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"No good reason, I suppose."

"I guess not."

"Where did you go?"

"Why, just up the street."

He waited a moment.

"You don't think that I'm asking for fun, do you?" says he.

"Why, I don't know. What's in your mind, Duster?"

"Where did you go when you first left the house?" asked The Duster.

"Why, out to the horses."

"What did you do before you went there?"

I stared at him. A real judge couldn't have made me feel more tied up and helpless than The Duster did, as he asked all these questions. Was he bluffing, I wondered, or did he really know something?

I stared past him, and saw the green gloom of the light that passed the door and fell on the face of the nearest tree.

"I don't know what you're driving at, Duster," said I.

"Don't you, Baldy?"

"No, I don't. What's in your mind?"

"That you've been crooked with me," he answered slowly. "Even you, Baldy Wye!"

It was a shameful thing to hear him talk to me like this, and with such an air. All at once I knew that I wasn't in any physical danger from him, but as a matter of fact I was in a worse danger than that—the danger of losing his respect.

This idea made me turn things over a couple of times in my head before I could speak again, and then I said: "What do you think that I've done, Duster?"

"Double crossed me," said he.

"So?" said I. "Double crossed you how?"

"That's what I hoped you would tell me," he replied.

He sat down in the chair nearest to the door and faced toward me, making a smoke. He had been getting ready for bed, and now his shirt was unbuttoned at the neck, and his boots were off, and I saw his feet, just the mates of his slender, sinewy, blue-veined

hands. But still he didn't look rough or out of place. The Duster was the sort of fellow who would have been at home anywhere. It was a pleasure to watch him, always.

I stared again at the dust on the trousers I was wearing and for the second time I wondered how he could tell the color of that dust from the color of the dust down the valley side of the Christmas River. However, I said nothing for a minute, but simply turned the idea over in my mind. I liked The Duster. I more than liked him. It was something like the love that a father might have for a son, I think, and partly admiration of his smartness, and pity for his wasted life, and fear for his future, and disgust at his crookedness, and belief in his courage—but all these things began to boil in me, so that at last I had to speak out things that I hadn't intended to say.

"When I left the house," said I, "I crawled under it and listened to the talk."

The Duster licked his cigarette with the tip of his tongue and whipped the wet edge over the dry leaf with a swift, sure stroke. Then he placed the end of it in his mouth and raised his eyes to me.

"Was it fair to do that?" he asked.

"Was it fair to make me think that Manness was going to lead you to the dickens?" I asked him right back.

"That's my business."

"The blowing of a bank is everybody's business," I answered. "You know it. But I could name twenty poor wretches who would go bust if that bank were broken!"

"The little men could be bought off," said The Duster. "I mean to say I could pay my conscience and them, afterward, what they had lost."

"Manness would never consent to that."

'Manness couldn't control my half of the loot."

"You've told the minister that you're going straight, Duster."

"I've told him that," argued The Duster. "And I shall. What does one slip make? When a night has lasted ten hours, what does one more dark minute mean to anybody? Why, after this job is finished, I'll never look at a burglar kit again."

"You'd better," said I. "Because sooner or later Manness will be sure to land you in trouble up to the neck, and then you may have to steal yourself away."

He grinned a little.

He was young, The Duster. But somehow I never had realized how young until that moment, as I watched him.

For suddenly it appeared to me that he was actually enjoying this whole affair. Enjoying the danger, the mischief, the threat of continual blackmail from Manness, of course, and the scorn and contempt of the minister, and above all, the love of Marguerite Lamont. She could love a criminal, as she had proved, but neither of us had much doubt that she would never be able to waste her time on a liar.

Take women by and large, and it's the little sins that count with them, not the fine big ones that slam you down to the fire and the red torment for the rest of existence.

She could more easily forgive The Duster a hundred sins of bloodshed than a single misstatement to her about himself.

I realized this. The Duster did, too, beyond a doubt. "Manness never could handle me," he declared. "And I'll see no more of the face of him. He'll take care of the others. He'll make my way smooth for me. But, Baldy, no matter what was in your mind, where did you go this evening?"

"I saw Renney," said I.

"Renney?" cries The Duster. "The sheriff?"

"Yes."

He bit his lip and then looked up at the ceiling. I expected to see him fly into a rage. But he merely nodded his head a couple of times and said no more. He was waiting.

"I wanted to tell Renney what was happening, and I would have let him know the danger that the bank was in. But he wouldn't listen. He seemed to guess that I had something up my sleeve, and he dodged me. He began to talk about loyalty and men who never betrayed their friends!"

That stirred The Duster to the quick, for he got up and stepped to me with a gleam in his eye.

"Did Renney do that?" he asked me.

"He did."

The Duster made a turn through the room, then flung down his cigarette and ground out the lighted end beneath his heel.

"How many men like Renney are there in the world?" he asked me.

"Not one," said I, and I think I told the truth.

"He trusts me!" said The Duster. "Baldy, I thought he was simply playing a game with me, but I was wrong. He trusts me! Manness—Marguerite—Renney——"

Imagine The Duster throwing up his hands above his head in surrender to the complexity of his problem. But I didn't wonder. I couldn't advise him. If he failed to do what Manness wanted, that rascal would expose him in such a light that Marguerite would loathe him as much as she had loved him, the town of Christmas would detest him, and he would have to step out of this chapter of his life.

But if he accepted the demand of Manness and helped him in the crime, he became perjured to Lamont, and untrue to the girl, and—I think it bore with him as much weight as anything else—he would be failing the trust which the sheriff imposed in him.

Now, as I looked at The Duster in his trouble, feeling perfectly certain that what he could not solve would be a problem too great for me to touch, I suddenly saw a way out, or thought I did, so that I cried out: "Duster, I've got it!"

CHAPTER X.

WHO HAS THE LETTER?

THE moment I spoke, I felt that my idea wouldn't do, but still it was the only way to get out of this trouble. The Duster came over and laid a hand on my shoulder, waiting for the word.

"Go on, Baldy," said he. "Go on, old head."

"There's two things to do," said I, tying my forehead in a knot. "To get hold of the letter that Manness has written——"

"Ah," says The Duster, "are there 'papers' to be found?"

I saw him smiling a little.

"Aye," says I, "it's exactly like one of those yarns. You get the papers, and then——"

"And then Manness simply writes another letter and undoes all my work?"

"And when you get the papers," said I, "you land Manness and kill him before he can write again."

I had followed out my own thought, though now I went into a panic as I saw the outcome of my idea.

The Duster stared at me as though I were wearing a new face.

"Here's a good, gentle idea for an honest man who lives inside the law," says he. "Do you mean it, Baldy?"

"How else?" said I. "Is there any other way out for you, Duster?"

"There's no other way," said he, "and this way is impossible. I never could follow the back trail of Manness. Why, Baldy, that fellow leaves no more track upon the ground than a bird leaves in the air."

"Has he always been that way?"

"Aye, he was always the one to man-

age the retreats and the marches when we were together. A grizzly bear couldn't have solved some of the trail problems that he used to construct. No, no! I'd never be able to backtrack him. Especially since I don't know when the track was laid!"

"Then couldn't you cast around and find some other way of striking at his hiding place for that letter? Who's the man around Christmas that would let Manness confide in him?"

"You can buy ninety out of a hundred people to do anything you want," says The Duster.

"But a thing like this is pretty important. Everything depends for him on his ability to trust the man that holds that letter. Suppose that the gent, instead of playing square, read the letter, and found out what was in it, and then either went directly to the police, or else came and sold the thing to you?"

The Duster nodded.

He walked suddenly to the door and stood there with his head thrown back, breathing the night. When he turned back to me, he said: "My brain's in a muddle. Total muddle, Baldy. Love is like overeating. It leaves you fit for nothing but sleep. Now I'm going to tackle this business with a clear mind. And of course you're right. Manness would either trust that letter to a simpleton who had received nothing, or else to a crook like himself who had been well bought. If he's given the letter to an honest man, we're lost and can't do a thing about it. But if he's given it to a crook, then I may be able to spot the man, because I know most of the people he's familiar with. Who's in Christmas?"

"There's Willie Dunstan," said I, to help along. "He's been in prison."

"Dunstan," said The Duster, "is a coward who got his sister's money by forgery. He's not a crook; he's a yellow cur. Manness is not a fool, and nobody but a fool would trust a coward."

I was silent, after this. The criminal world was apparently something that a person had to view from the inside, if he wished to know anything about it. So I said no more.

The Duster went on, reckoning over the list of the people he knew in Christmas who had done shady things. It was wonderful how well he knew them. Once I asked him how he could remember faces so well, and he said: "For eight years there's been a rope ready to hang me, and every man I meet may be the fellow who wants to tie it around my neck. That teaches you to watch faces, Baldy."

A pretty good answer, and the result was surprising. He ran off twenty names of people he had seen in Christmas who had some sort of a strong-arm record as criminals behind them. He went through a list of green-goods men, and all sorts of yeggs, and gunmen, and rustlers, and thieves of all kinds, and even down to sheer murderers. Most of those names he muttered to himself, and part of the list made my hair stand on end. The Duster knew things that the police didn't dream of.

"'Chuck' Partridge," says he—that wasn't the real name, of course. "There's a good chance! Chuck knew Manness back in Chicago, several years ago."

"Why," said I, "Partridge is just a plain grocer and the straightest man in town, everybody says!"

"Sure they do," said The Duster. "Sometimes people ride so fast that they scare themselves into getting out of the saddle. And sometimes crooks commit crimes that scare them into going straight. It's that way with Chuck Partridge."

"I don't believe it, Duster," said I.

"Partridge did this," said The Duster. "I'm talking to you in confidence, mind you; but you ought to have an

idea of what sort Partridge is, anyway. Partridge about twelve years ago was a second-story man back East. I won't tell you his real name, because you don't need to know it for this story's sake. But at any rate, he was a good, prosperous, steady, second-story man."

"What do you mean by good, steady, and prosperous, second-story man?" I asked.

The Duster frowned a little, as though I were asking to have a perfectly obvious thing defined.

"He was good," said he, "because he didn't use a lead pipe or carry a gun. He used to think that it would be better to be pinched than to shoot his way to liberty. The one thing he dreaded most was getting into a corner and killing any one. He was steady, because he kept at the business year after year. He was prosperous, because though he never did anything really beautiful and big, like Harry Kline, or Hal Dikkon, still, he made plenty of hauls, and he didn't spend more than half his life in prison. You see?"

"I see," said I.

I really didn't; but I did see how far Duster was from the world and the people I'd lived with.

"And one day while Partridge was going through an upstairs room, picking up some small loot, here and there, a man blundered into the room where he was. He was an old man with a white beard, and the crook saw his image in the mirror.

"Ordinarily, Chuck would have paid no attention. But this time it was different. He had just got engaged to be married. He had been up so many times that the next job would take him ten years up the river. And suddenly these things all jumped through his mind. He turned and shot, and put a bullet through the old man's heart.

"Afterward, it came out that the old fellow was blind, and the shock of knowing that he had done a murder, and a useless murder, was pretty tough on Chuck. So he married his girl, and took his savings, and moved out here to Christmas, where he's gone straight ever since."

It nearly paralyzed me to hear this.

"If Chuck is a murderer, then anybody can be a murderer!" said I.

"Of course," said The Duster. "You never said a truer thing than that!"

I wonder if he was right?

At any rate, it stumped me. I suppose it's an old idea that we're all crooked, except by luck. And that case of Partridge hammered the thought home in my brain.

"But Chuck has gone straight now," said I. "It may be one of the other crooks that Manness has used, but it's not likely to be Chuck."

"Because he's gone straight?"

"Yes. Exactly."

"Don't you see that because Chuck is straight, he's open to blackmail? And blackmail is the style of Manness. It's cheap. And as for the danger, if he's willing to risk it with me, don't you think that he'd risk it with Chuck?"

I thought that over. Yes, if a man would venture on threatening The Duster, as Manness had done in my own hearing, then he was brave enough to attempt anything.

The Duster began to pace the floor again.

It was an odd thing that I could stand seeing him do almost anything, but it was hard for me to watch him walk the floor. I'd proved over and over again that in spite of his crimes The Duster was kind, good-natured, generous, and never the fellow to take advantage of such a man as I. And yet whenever I saw him pacing up and down, it gave me a chill, because there was so much of the hunting cat in his manner. That long, gliding, noiseless step used to make me feel that he was about to turn around and start hunting me.

And he had a way of pausing, when an idea struck him, and raising his head, and looking at you the way that a tiger in the zoo will sometimes lift its head and turn its big yellow eyes on you. Altogether, I never was a comfortable man when The Duster was walking to and fro.

At last he said to me: "Baldy, it may be that I've argued myself into the idea, but it appears to me that after I've talked him over, Chuck Partridge is the man with whom Manness must have left the letter!"

"Go on!" said I. "It's only because we've been talking about him so much."

"Of course," admitted The Duster. "That may be what's put the thought so suddenly and firmly into my mind, but I really think that I can't get it out, now. At any rate, Chuck may as well be our beginning."

"You have to begin somewhere," said I.

"Will you help me, Baldy?" he said.

"Of course," said I. "If I can!"

"I think you can. Come along with me, and we'll start for his house now."

"You mean right now? To-night?"

"How long do you think I have before me?" asked The Duster without impatience. "I'm due to join Manness to-morrow evening at the First National. Will you come, Baldy?"

All answers were scared out of me. At last I saw myself dragged into The Dusters' net, but I couldn't very well let him down now. So I stood up and went with him into the darkness.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PROVIDENT MINISTER.

WE made no particular preparation. Some one has said that a good horse is always ready to run, and I suppose that The Duster was in the same class—always ready to fight; he had fought so many times before and had done so many terrible things that all I wondered at was to find myself heading with him for what was sure to be a storm!

I remember that he was whistling softly as we went down the path, while I was saying to myself that before long I was sure to be involved in an explosion that was apt to blow the top off my head.

As we came out from the path through the trees and to the roadside, we had a good view of Christmas lights rolling up the hill, looking as though every one were awake, though we knew for sure that that was not the case. Most people were getting ready for bed, by this hour; but there was a cart coming down the road close to us, so close that we could hear the jounce and squeak of its inwards as it pounded along, and the bump of the wheels on the ruts, and the rattle of loose spokes in the wheels.

This cart pulled up close to us, where we could see the shapes of a man and a woman in the seat, with the darkness drawn over them like masks and great coats.

"Is that you, John?" said the voice of Lamont.

It took my breath. I mean, the idea of the minister coming on us just as we were starting off on an errand which we hoped would end in the death of a man.

"Here I am," said The Duster, and went up close to the cart.

I held back a little, but I knew it was Lamont and his daughter.

"Marguerite couldn't sleep without seeing you again," said Lamont. "So here I've brought her over. I couldn't sleep very well without seeing you again myself, Duster. Though I don't want you to think that you're marrying a family when you take my girl."

I heard The Duster laugh, high and light-hearted, as though he had no more cares than a boy. And suddenly I was sure that his heart was light. That is

to say, he could not make himself groan and worry over things the way other people did, but could separate each instant from all that came before and after. If he were on his deathbed, he would have been able to criticize and enjoy a glass of wine ten seconds before he was gripped by the last agony.

I never knew anybody else like that, able to keep the present unshadowed by the past and unpoisoned by the future.

I mused on that idea and didn't pay close heed to the first words of the talking, except that I heard Marguerite laughing, after a while, and that was as sweet and happy a sound as ever came bubbling out of a girl's throat.

Then I made out that they were discussing what The Duster would be able to do in order to make a living and support a family. It was the minister's suggestion that they start this discussion. He was just the opposite of The Duster, and believed "in facing every difficulty before it became an actual menace."

"But that sort of thing never shortened a bridge in the history of the world," said The Duster.

"It's kept many a pantry filled, however," replied the minister. "You'd better do a little charting of the future before you and Marguerite actually start out."

"I could break bronchos," said The Duster.

"Ah, John!" says the girl—not audibly enough to make a real protest, but enough to show what she thought of her darling risking his neck that way.

"The Duster is made of whalebone," said the minister, in answer to that soft cry. "But, as a matter of fact, there are other objections to that sort of a job."

"Yes," said The Duster. "It wears out a lot of trousers, for one thing."

"Of course it does," said the minister, "but it would never bring in the amount of money that you need to live on, John."

"I can live as cheaply as the next man," said The Duster. "I haven't any larger appetite than most, and three yards of cloth will make me a suit."

"You're used to having what you want," replied Lamont. "You ought to realize that about yourself, and if you start playing poor and living poor, you'll soon be in torment."

"Listen to me," said The Duster. "I'll pull my share with most men. I know it won't all be a sweet song."

"It won't," said the minister, "and I know that you'll not give up easily. But I don't believe in pain, Duster. If you start in as a day-laborer—well, it may not work out except to starve you of every pleasure in life and callous the heart of Margie, here!"

"You don't know!" says the girl. "Oh, but I can work!"

"Of course you can," says Lamont, "for otherwise we wouldn't have done much eating in my house, the last few years. However, I must say that you ought to try an easier line than mere manual labor, Duster."

"I might open a hardware store," said The Duster, "and specialize in burglar tools!"

I thought that was a little too much to say right in front of the girl, but that hard streak in The Duster had to come out in some way, every now and then. She would have to take him with it, or leave him without it.

"I don't think that you'll need to specialize in burglars' tools," says the minister. "However, there's no doubt that the quality of your knives and guns would be trusted by every one, Duster!"

That set me back on my heels, you had better believe—I mean, to hear the minister meet Thurlow on his own ground, in such a rough and careless way. You might have thought that he didn't care a rap whom his daughter married.

"Or there's insurance," said The Duster.

"A harder line than breaking bronchos," said the minister, who seemed to know a good deal about life, after all.

"I think it is," agreed The Duster. "Then what do you say about circus work—like trick shooting?"

After this a little pause followed.

"You don't take this very seriously," said the minister.

"No, I don't," admitted The Duster. "When the time comes, I'll have my hands filled with honest work. I'm sure of that. There's always a gamble, but it's the honest man who plays the sure thing."

"How do you make that out?"

"He's sure that the police will leave him alone, and that's a peace of mind that I've never known."

Suddenly they all laughed together.

I was glad to hear that laughter, for it seemed to me that The Duster was carrying things along with a pretty high hand. However, Lamont almost immediately said that he realized it was foolish to offer advice to young people, and told The Duster to go his own way. And The Duster had enough grace to thank him.

Afterward, however, he stepped close to the cart and I saw him take the hands of Marguerite.

"Are you worried about the future?" he asked her.

"Not the least in the world," said she, and kissed him. "You're in the safe hands of Mr. Wye, and he'll show the right road out!"

That was pretty good of her, ringing me in, in that way, and sort of making me part of the family circle. They said good night in another moment, and the cart went off down the road, with Lamont clucking to the horse.

"Good man," says The Duster, looking after them, "but he's got the hen instinct. Has to have people under his wings and shelter them from the world. I'll tell you what, Baldy. Good men do almost as much harm as the bad ones. You can corrupt a young man by teaching him crooked cards, but you can also corrupt his life and make it turn rotten under his hands by making him too self-conscious and too afraid of the future. Take most of these moralists and virtuous men—they're apt to spend most of their time praising Heaven—because they've been saved. No sailor would be glad to get the ship to port if there were no cargo aboard. And wherever I land, I'll bring something ashore, or sink the ship in trying."

I knew what he meant—which was that he meant to lead a full life and a rich one, even if it were not rich in money.

We walked on down the street together, The Duster whistling, as carefree as ever. Finally he said to me: "But about keeping in the hands of Baldy—that's a grand idea that I intend to follow."

"Bah," said I, "you're no more in my hands than in the hands of the wind."

He took on a troubled voice, just as though he really were bothered.

"Don't say that, Baldy," said he. "Look at me to-night, about to commit robbery and murder just because you've advised me to do it!"

Well, what could you say to a fellow like that? He would be laughing on his deathbed and groaning on his wedding day, without a doubt.

As we went along, I pointed out a house bigger than the rest—the Gardiner place, with a lot of old trees around it. It was one of the first places built in Christmas, out of the money that old man Steve Gardiner made by shortchanging his customers out in Goldfield.

"Muncie has come to stay there," said I.

"I know it," answered The Duster.

"and that's why I wanted to go this way."

"Why? To look at the house?"

"I want to call on him. Come along," said he.

I went along with him, of course, but a good deal puzzled by this idea of his. It would about give Muncie a fit, I thought, to see The Duster again; because no matter what others thought, I knew that Muncie still clung to the idea that The Duster was the guilty man in that Emmet robbery which had taken six hundred thousand out of the Muncie vault, and damaged his banking business more than you could reckon up in a day. However, so long as The Duster wanted to see the man, I had no objection.

He had brought a saddlebag along with him when he left the Ridley house, and this he slung over his shoulder as we went up to the Gardiner place and let the old wooden gate swing back with a creak on the weight of its pulley. So we walked up the path, and into one of the strangest interviews that I ever witnessed.

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW CONTRACT.

A SERVANT opened the door to us. He was as straight as an arrow, but he was so old that he looked sort of moldy. I mean, his skin seemed covered with gray dust, and his hair was thin, and there was even a film over his eyes. Those eyes floated past me and settled on The Duster. It was plain that he knew him—everybody in Christmas did, for that matter, by this time.

He took us into the parlor. Parlors are bad anywhere, but they're worse in the West. Old Gardiner came from New England; and this was a regular transplanted New England parlor, all carpeted in blue, with red flowers, and enlarged photographs on the wall of hard-faced men wearing goat's beards, and women not even trying to smile, their clothes were so tight. There was a horse-hair sofa, and some chairs with plush-covered seats, and when we sat down on them, the springs inside creaked, all in a different key. It was something like sitting down on the keyboard of a piano that was badly out of tune.

The man went out of the room and came back in another moment with Gardiner and Muncie.

You could see why they were friends. Solder them together and get all their blood running under one hide, and they'd about have made one man. They looked as though one square meal could last the two of them together for a month. Their eyes were always narrowed, like a prize fighter's, watching for an opening; and their mouths were tight shut, with the muscles at the base of the jaw working softly in and out. These old men were childless, and looked it. They appeared light—like hawks which are fast on the wing and have strong claws for striking. And as they came gliding through the door on their long, thin legs, they looked as though they were hunting for something on the floor.

The Duster chose to be glad and hearty at seeing them.

"Hello, Mr. Muncie!" says he, and steps forward with his hand out.

"Humph!" says Muncie, and put his hand behind his back.

But he brought it out again, by jerks, as though he were afraid that something would happen to him if he refused The Duster's greeting; he acted as though he were giving a signature on a blank check, the old skinflint!

"Well, Mr. Muncie," says The Duster, "I just dropped in to find out if you have any possible trace of the two scoundrels who robbed you, there in Emmet?"

"I know the name of one of them," says Muncie, wrinkling his face.

"Do you?" says The Duster. "Then I suppose he'll soon be in jail."

"He should be," answered Muncie, "but he's a slippery young fox."

"What's his name?"

"John Thurlow, commonly called The Duster."

The Duster laughed.

"Do you still pin that job on me, sir?" says he.

"No other man in the world could have done what I saw done that night," said Muncie.

"But that robber was wounded in the side," says The Duster.

"There are tricks in every trade," replied Muncie, "and I don't pretend to understand the tricks of yours. Why did you come here, Thurlow?"

"To prove that I'm an honest man," said The Duster.

Old Muncie grinned, and so did Gardiner in the background. They looked like a pair of hawks, more than ever. But I was surprised that Muncie didn't rage and fume. Instead, he appeared like a fellow playing a hard game of cards, and trying to guess what lay in his opponent's hand.

I began to admire him a little, for an old, tough sport.

"I'd like to hear the proof," said Muncie.

"I'll tell you what it is," said The Duster. "I'm willing to go to work for you."

Muncie nodded and smiled again.

"Go on," said he. "I like the sound of your voice, Duster."

"You have a ranch down in the Big Bend," said The Duster.

"Well?"

"If you'll pay me a share of the profits, I'll run that ranch for you."

Muncie turned a little and looked at Gardiner, and then the two old cronies laughed silently together.

But Muncie did not refuse The Duster's strange offer all at once. He seemed pleased to play with the idea for a while. He said: "You know cows, Duster?"

"No," said The Duster, "but I'm a good hand with a Colt."

"You know how to keep a herd clean of disease, and such things?"

"Not a bit," said The Duster, "but I'm handy with a rifle."

"You've had some experience on a ranch?"

"Not a whit of experience."

"Then why do you come here and ask me to hire you?"

"I'll tell you why," said The Duster. "But you'll have to stop asking questions and answer a few."

"Go on, my boy!"

"How much ought that ranch to be worth, with the stock on it?"

"Three or four hundred thousand dollars, at least."

"How long have you had the land, and the stock?"

"Twelve years."

"How much have you made on it?"

"Why——" said Muncie, "I make a——"

"I'll answer for you. That land you've never made a penny on, and now you tell me why?"

"The rascally Mexican robbers join hands with the white rustlers, and my cows are sluiced away through the mountains and never see the markets I fatten them for!"

"Why do you hang onto the land?"

"I won't be beaten, not if it costs me a hundred thousand a year. I won't throw up my hands and quit!"

His teeth clicked. He was a fighter, that old bird of prey.

"You see how I fit in?" said The Duster.

"I'm sorry," said Muncie, "but I'm getting old, and I don't see things as quickly as I used to!"

"I'll explain. If you could get a return of fifteen thousand a year on that land, you'd be one of the happiest men in the world."

"Fifteen thousand? It isn't much for the investment!"

"I know how much you spent to get the place," said The Duster.

Muncie blinked and failed to pursue the subject.

"Fifteen thousand would be worth considering," said he. "Do you know of some one who wants to rent at that price?"

"I'll take it," said The Duster, "and you give me what I clean up above that sum."

"Go on," said Muncie. "Explain why I should trust you with such a place?"

"Of course, I'll explain. In the first place, I can stop the gaps in those mountains, and close the sluices that have been carrying your cows away."

"Very well," says Muncie, his eyes sharper and brighter than ever.

"And in the second place, my ignorance about cows doesn't really matter."

"No?"

"No, because Baldy Wye, here, knows cows from A to Z. He would be foreman of the place for me."

Muncie turned his head and gave me ten seconds of concentrated attention that made me red.

"Yes," says he. "I know about Wye, and he could run a place of that size, I think, with strong backing."

"Very well," said The Duster, "I've brought along a little contract here, and I'll be glad to take your signature on it. You can glance over the paper. It's very simple, and yet it includes all the points of importance."

He handed over the slip, but Muncie did not look at it. He stared at The Duster instead.

"Do you think that I'm a madman, my son?" said he.

"Not at all. I think that you're a sensible man," says The Duster, "and that, therefore, you'll see your advantage."

"Or else see all my cattle cleaned off the place in a week?"

The Duster looked up to the ceiling for an idea—and found one.

"I've been accused of killing, of crooked gambling, of robbery. But never accused of lying, Mr. Muncie."

"Do you really expect that I'll take you on?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me why?"

"Because you know that three days after I get to the ranch, there won't be a rustler on this side of the Rio Grande."

Muncie turned again in his chair, slowly, and looked in silence at Gardiner, who broke out testily: "Don't be a fool, man! Are you getting childish in your old age?"

"You think that I ought to throw the paper away?"

"And the man after it," said Gardiner. "The scoundrel has helped to rob you of six hundred thousand dollars, and probably has half of the spoils in that same saddlebag he's carrying with him now!"

Muncie started a little.

He had taken out a pen and now turned it back and forth in his fingers.

"I've generally taken your advice all my life long," said he. "And now, old fellow, I'm going against it. Duster, there's your contract!"

He slashed a signature on it and passed it back. I was never more astonished in my life, and Gardiner groaned out loud.

"You haven't read the terms," said The Duster.

"I'm taking a blind chance," said Muncie, "and why should I strain my eyes to see in the dark?"

"You've dropped half a million to this man already!" raged Gardiner.

"Gardiner," said the old banker, "why throw in your shoes after your coat? Duster, you have the contract. When do you start south?"

"In a week—as soon as I'm safely married."

Muncie nodded, and then stood up.

"Duster," said he, "you have a front of brass. You are going to make money for me—perhaps more than you've stolen from me."

"About that Emmet affair," said The Duster. "A friend of mine had a hand in that. He wanted me to assure you that the only reward he wanted out of that evening was the fun he had marching you across the street at the muzzle of his gun."

"Suppose I had jumped—would he have fired?" asked Muncie.

"He would have blown your backbone in two with all the pleasure in the world."

"I believe he would," said Muncie, with a faint sigh.

"He had so much fun that he asked me to return the cash he brought away from the bank," said The Duster. "So I've carted it over in the saddlebag, and there you are. Good night Muncie!"

And away he went, with me staggering behind him, and in our wake a pair of the most astonished and silent men in the world.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DUSTER WAS RIGHT.

WHAT'S the quality of every great man?

Ease, I'd say.

Even in athletes it's that way. The fellow who ties himself in knots of effort never arrives, but the sleek-moving man wins the race. And the fighter with big cushions and pads of muscle all over him is knocked out by the thin-armed slugger, who throws a wallop like a chunk of lead on the end of a rope. Your great pitcher has a soft action that won't wear out; I've seen them on the mound making the ball look as though it were a bird that had to go where the master sent it. And it's the same way with men of brains. The easy-going fellow is the one who counts in the long run. He's the chap who does his thinking without getting dyspepsia; and the result is that he can keep on thinking all the year long, without fatigue, while your fellow with the knotted brow goes to sleep in the critical moment and loses a million in a minute.

And here was The Duster lazying along the street with a third of a million in a saddlebag, and taking it to return it to the hands of the man he'd stolen it from. But not bribing him with the hard cash—making his point first, and landing his job on a big scale by sheer effrontery. And then letting Muncie have his reward, so to speak, afterward.

Reporting the words of that conversation doesn't give the picture, but I remember that at the time I wasn't at all surprised that Muncie gave The Duster the job.

He had placed me, too, with a single word, and given me a better chance than I'd ever dreamed of getting, at my time in life, when the big new jobs are hard to come at.

And suddenly I had a great confidence that he would win out all down the line.

There was still the letter to get from Partridge, and there was still the meeting with Manness, to accomplish before the morning should come, but I was certain that he would not fail. Which didn't keep the gooseflesh from running over me in shudders as I thought of the work that lay ahead.

We went up the street toward the Partridge house with no more hurry than when we had started.

The Duster said: "Where would Partridge keep a letter like that?"

"In a safe along with his store cash," said I.

"You forget what his business used to be," said The Duster. "He's seen too many little safes cracked with a can-opener to want to take chances now, with such things."

"In the attic, then, or the cellar."

"Simply because there are a lot of things to be searched through? Boxes, old trunks, etc.? No, because every robber knows that time will cover that difficulty—time and patience."

"Are you going to find out where the letter is by simply talking about it?" I asked The Duster.

He stopped a moment, with his hand on the top of a picket fence, and his head lifted, as he often did when he was thinking hard. There were no clouds in the sky this night, except the mist of the Milky Way, but there was so much dust in the air that the stars were dim points.

He didn't answer my question directly, but after a moment he thoughtfully said:

"There's Chuck's house before us, and Chuck's in the garden."

"You mean to say that you can see Chuck there?" said I, because all I could make out was a blur of the heads of vines, over the top of the fence.

"I can see the head of the spray from the sprinkler, however," said The Duster.

Now that I strained my eyes, I could make that out myself, faintly shining, like a thin mist, or a ghost.

"Does that mean Chuck has to be in the garden?" I asked.

"You're going to make a mystery out of everything," said The Duster, chuckling a little, "like one of the sleuths in dectective stories. But Chuck's wife is too fat and lazy to be in the garden at this time of night. Besides, Chuck loves gardens, and that's why he has about the only one in Christmas."

That made his reasoning seem simple enough. For certainly Chuck had the only lawn and almost the only lawn sprinkler in that town.

"If you'll go first and talk to him," said The Duster, "I'll take a look through his house, and examine his desk, because it's just possible that he has put the letter there."

"And if you miss it?"

"Then I come out and take it from Partridge with a gun."

"He wouldn't be carrying it himself," said I.

"I think he would."

"At any rate," said I, "I'm not going to mix myself up in this affair, Duster. I'll do what I can to help you clean up the mess. And as for Manness, I'd fight that cur any time for you. But, otherwise, you'll have to count me out of the thing. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

"Fair?" said The Duster, in that voice of his which was halfway between a sneer and a laugh. "It's as fair as shining gold, and it'll get you into Heaven. Will you go ahead and talk to Chuck?"

"While you sneak up behind and hold him up?" I asked, because I was getting angry, by this time.

"Go on, then," said he, "and Heaven help all good men to do something outside of their own salvation."

"Duster," said I, "there's not even any surety in you that Chuck Partridge so much as has the letter. And you want me to have a hand in robbing him of something?"

"Do this, then," said The Duster. "Go ahead and you'll find Chuck cooling himself in his shirt sleeves and singing to the water as it spills on the garden. Go up to him and say good evening, and ask him in the next breath where he can find Hector Manness. Will you do that for me? Then, when you leave, you can walk up the street and pay no more attention to what happens."

"And give you a signal about what I've heard?"

"I'll be close enough to hear that," said The Duster.

That made me a little angry again, because The Duster's assumption of

omniscience and ubiquity would have made any one grow hot for a flash.

"Let me think that over for a moment," said I.

He wanted my help, and yet he chose that moment to mock me again.

"Ah, amaranthine thoughts of Baldy Wye!" says he, and walks slowly on.

I set my teeth when I heard this, but I controlled myself until I knew that my voice would be steady.

"Duster," said I, "I can't work with you in this job."

He did not answer, and then I added: "Perhaps you'd do Chuck no harm. But I simply don't feel like trusting you, or helping to put another man's life into your hands——"

Still he did not answer. We had been strolling along for the last few seconds, and he seemed to have fallen behind, but when I turned around, The Duster was gone!

It startled me, and then angered me again. We were walking along near a battered, seedy, time-worn fir hedge, as transparent as the naked ribs of a ship. Even at noon it would hardly have cast a shade on its own roots. I had no doubt that The Duster had slipped through a hole in this.

"Duster, Duster!" I called, as loudly as I dared. "I tell you, I'm not going ahead in this job!"

Still he did not answer.

There was such trickiness and cheapness in this disappearance of his that I grew hotter than ever and really yearned to see him so that I could say what I thought of such cheapness. However, still he did not come, and all at once I knew that he would not come, that he had gone ahead of me, and would soon be at his work in or near the house of the grocer of the two lives, Chuck Partridge.

"You can wait there forever, so far as I'm concerned," said I to myself, and turned on my heel.

Straightway, I turned back again, for once more the picture came into my mind of The Duster crouched there in the shadow, or stealing from one half-lighted place to another, waiting for me, and the power of his expectancy was more than I could endure.

I began to walk forward, telling myself that I would soon stop, but that I must think out the proper procedure.

Then I told myself that I was simply hypnotized and that I must use my will against this young man, like a bird against a snake.

But still I walked forward. I remember looking down the long slope of the hill expecting to see the dim, star-struck blackness of the Christmas River in the hollow, but the valley was thick with a rising land mist that clouded the cool of the night in all the low places. Christmas Hill was surrounded by thin fog on all sides, and made me feel like a man walking out of the sea onto an island!

But still I went on against my will, until I came to the garden gate of Chuck Partridge, and I told myself that at least it would do no harm to see if that fake prophet, the young Duster, really was right about Chuck himself being out there at that time of night, watching the watering of his ground.

A whirl of wind came at me, just then, and filled my eyes and my nostrils with choking blow-sand, so that I was still choking and crying when I looked over the gate and down the path. There, sure enough, I saw the figure of Chuck in silhouette against the white face of his house.

When I say that I recognized him by the silhouette you'll be surprised, but I may say that the silhouette of Chuck was as personal and characteristic as the face of another man in the full light of the noon.

The curves in Chuck went all the wrong way. His chest was hollow, and his stomach flowed out magnificently, and he had a great hump behind his

shoulders which thrust his head out in front at a downward angle. His neck, which ought to have been huge to match the big, flabby, hanging jowls of his face, instead was quite thin and very long, and it looked always rigid, as if with the weight that it was carrying around, and red as sunburn, or the chafing of his coat collar.

He was standing there, as The Duster said, watching the rising of the spray that went upward from the patent lawn sprinkler and was known rather by its whispering sound than its sight as it first arose against the shadow of the hedge, stood up silver and thin against the sky above, and fell showering back. There was a sound of hushing as the water swept out, and there was also the pattering of a very light rain. I hardly wondered that Chuck should stand there to get cool, as late as this, with all his house black and sleeping behind him.

Now, out of the hills beyond Christmas, in the direction of the mines, I heard a tremor of sound which, at that distance, I knew must be a great charge of powder, detonated at this late hour. But that did not surprise me so much as the fulfillment of The Duster's little prophecy.

Because it made me feel that he must be absolutely right in every respect in his judgments.

CHAPTER XIV.

POOR FAT MAN!

A MAN can grow tired of mystery. When I was a kid, I've lain alone at night in camp or in a house listening to sounds until I got bored with being frightened, and simply got up and yawned, or else turned over and fell asleep like a stone. I was tired of this mystery about The Duster's foreknowledge in the same way, and I said: "Hello, Chuck! That you up so late?"

He came over toward me with a fat man's waddle, and when he spoke, there was a taste of salt sea in his voice—I mean it was hoarse as a sea-storm blowing. As a matter of fact, he was an old blue-nose.

He came so close that he could put a hand on the top of the gate post and he spoke in a confiding way, which he nearly always had, as though he were inviting you into the most private chamber of his mind.

"I like to come out here, Baldy," said he, "and listen to the ground drinking, and let the wind blow a couple or three puffs of the spray against my face. Because afterward, I'm sure of a cool sleep, and it satisfies my thirst more'n a half doen bottles of ice-cold beer, if you foller along what I mean, Wye?"

I said that I did.

"You ought've been a farmer, Chuck," said I, "liking the ground this much, and the things that it grows."

"The ground is honest, Baldy," said he. "It gives you back what you put into it. It ain't a bank. It gives you back a tree for an acorn, and is plumb ashamed of itself if it can't return you a thousand per cent. This here garden of mine, it's got a big heart, which means something. And when it's willing to do so much for me—— Look at that wisteria, will you? I planted that just five years back, and look where it's growed all over the whole dog-gone face of the house, will you? In five years! I say, when the ground will do that much for me, why shouldn't I do something back for it—which it's only asking for water! So I come out along here in the evening and turn the sprinkler loose. Sometimes my old woman, she sets there in the rocking chair—you can see it by the pillar—and she rattles the newspaper and pretends to read by the light that comes out through the window, but really she's the same as me, listening to the water falling, and the roots drinking, and the whole dog-gone place saying 'Thank you' under

its breath. I tell you, I listen, like that, and it's far better than any conversation!"

It made me feel good to hear him talk like this. It made me feel warm around the heart and pity him a little, the way you always pity children that are not smart; the way you always pity simplicity wherever you meet it, even when you make use of it!

I remembered what The Duster had said about this man, and though I couldn't think that he actually would lie about Chuck, still, I had an idea that he was as wrong as could be about him now. If Chuck was not a good man and an honest citizen now, I would eat any man's hat.

I almost laughed, but I let the question pop out, anyway.

"The Duster wants me to ask you where he can find Manness, Chuck," said I.

The grocer didn't answer. His slanting neck, and his hanging, big head on the end of it, made him look as though he was a buzzard, standing there and thinking it over, with his fat hand still on the gate post.

But then he sort of slipped and slid, and wrapped his thick, soft arms around the top of his post, and laid his head on those arms.

I couldn't make out what he was saying, except that he was whispering something softly to himself. And I was so amazed and disgusted that you wouldn't believe me.

I poked my finger at him. It went into his shoulder like into the stomach of another man.

"Chuck," said I, "brace yourself up, will you?"

He made a big effort, I could see the wave of it go up through his body and wind up with the lifting of his head, which wavered a good deal back and forward. It staggered on his neck, if that don't sound like too strange a word to you.

"I'll brace up," said he. "But it took me aback. It—it pretty near sunk me."

He reached out and over my hand he put one of his, wet and soft as a warm sponge.

"Baldy," says he, with a dreadful quavering in his voice, "I always wanted—my wife, too—my wife and me—always wanted to have you in to dinner, Baldy—which I mean to say—well, old friends——"

I couldn't listen to this. It made me so terrible sick and dizzy. The Duster was right. I knew that. I suddenly could see this man shoot down the old blind fellow. The same man who would do that would now be here muttering and trembling and begging at his garden gate—but probably willing to murder me, too, if he thought that would preserve the quiet of his life and of his house.

I loathed him. But somehow, my heart swelled up with pity and sorrow so that it almost broke. He might be a toad, but he had made a woman happy, and he had built this house, and he had made the only garden that ever grew in Christmas, this ex-second-story man.

"I only want to know, Chuck," said I. "Just that, and I'm gone. I'm not talking. Besides, I don't know anything. I'm only told to come here and ask you this question."

He seemed to be shaking his head, but I knew that this was only the result of the horrible uncertainty of his nerves. He was so close now that I could see the quivering of his fat, pendulous cheeks, and the loose gaping of his mouth.

Mind you, there was no man in Christmas so much loved as Chuck Partridge that knew the first name of every mother's son and daughter in the town, and that used to have his pockets filled with store candy for the children, and that used to be Santa Claus on the big day of the year, the day that gave

the town its name. One of the little kids had called him "Mr. Christmas," and we all thought that it was a pretty good name for him.

And yet, one touch from The Duster, and this poor wretch was a shaking pulp. It disgusted me. But it also made me almost hate The Duster.

"It's a sudden question, Baldy," said he, "even from an old friend like you —which, as I was saying, we ain't had a chance to see you as much as we would like—only, Baldy—— Manness —Manness—— Oh, Heaven help me now!"

Do you think that sometimes fat men are like women? Only strong on the outside, but going to bits under a pinch. At any rate, poor Chuck began to clasp his thick hands together and gasp out his words. Then I remembered that The Duster had asked me only to put the question, not to insist upon any answer to it.

So I said: "It's all right, old-timer. I don't know anything. I've asked a question. You couldn't answer it. Good night, and don't let this spoil your sleep."

I started to back away, but he almost broke the gate down, throwing his arms out and dragging me back as if he loved me.

"Don't go, Baldy!" he said over and over. "Don't go!"

"I won't," I told him. "Dang it, don't you hear me? I won't go, Chuck, poor fellow. I'm staying here as long as you want me to. Now, what's the matter?"

He could only keep on clinging to me and begging like a woman. He began to cry. I never felt so sick and embarrassed and hot in my life as I did that moment with Mr. Christmas, the best-loved man in the town.

"If you go, The Duster himself will come for me," says he. "And if Manness is a ghost, The Duster is a monster—I beg your pardon—he's your friend—you know a little joke, Baldy and——"

He actually tried to laugh, the poor disintegrated fat rat.

"I'm here," says a soft voice at the side of the hedge, "but not to do you any harm, Chuck."

It was The Duster himself.

I grabbed Chuck under the pit of the arm, for I really expected him to drop down to the ground when The Duster appeared. If I had upset him with a question, what would the great Duster do?

But I was wrong. Imagination was stronger than fact with Chuck Partridge, it appeared, for now he stiffened up and stopped his whimpering and whispering.

"Duster!" says he. "I don't know why you should have sent to me to find out about a dead man."

"Hush," said The Duster, kindly and gently. "Don't bother with lies and deceptions, Chuck, but tell me at once where to find Manness."

Partridge made a gargling sound, but then he added: "Duster, whether he's in heaven or—— No, Duster, I really don't know where he is——"

"Give me your wallet," said The Duster.

"Aye, willingly," said the grocer. "You could have more money than there is in that, if you needed it, Duster. I'm your friend. I mean to say, I believe in you, and I've always admired you, and——"

He brought out his wallet and was handing it to The Duster, but The Duster, instead of taking the wallet, caught at the thick arm of the grocer and then pulled a letter out of the sleeve.

"You still have a fast hand, Chuck," he said.

Partridge fell loosely back against the gate post, but he didn't say a word. I could listen to his breathing, distinctly, and even that was shaky, like the beating of a fibrilating heart.

And The Duster put the envelope into his pocket.

"Now—Manness!" said he. "Tell me quickly, Chuck, where Manness can be found."

"Manness — Manness——" said Chuck. "I—I—what do you want with him, Duster?"

He kept wetting his lips with his tongue. He couldn't speak at all, without doing that repeatedly. Yet he never got his voice above the hoarse whisper.

"I'm going to kill him," said The Duster, "so tell me where he is, Chuck, and I'll guarantee that he'll never bother you again."

I expected Chuck to answer at once. But he didn't.

No, sir, paralyzed with fear as he was, still, he wouldn't betray what he knew of Manness. It was the strangest contrast of terror and shame and pride and decency that I ever saw or heard of. Poor Chuck!

The Duster didn't press the question at all. In fact, he stepped back a trifle from the fat man and then he said softly, with real wonder in his voice:

"I didn't guess that, but I might have. Manness is actually in this house, Chuck!"

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT CHRISTMAS RIVER KNEW.

SO that was the explanation of Chuck's reticence!

Ex-crook, and broken in spirit as he was, still he had enough of the West in him to want to be true to the duties of a host, even though the guest had foisted himself into his house. Well, that was one of the strangest things that I ever heard of. It gave me a chill up the spine, like impossible, brave things that you read of in books, or hear some grand liar tell.

I had another chill that was worth two of anything that Chuck gave me, and that was to think that The Duster might be right in his guess; for there he was, turning on his heel and walking back down the path toward the front door of the house.

That great billowy monster of a man, Partridge, lurched after him, but I had sense and strength enough to grab him and haul him back.

"I've got to stop him!" whispered big Chuck. "I've got to save——"

"D'you have to save one killer from another?" I asked him sharply, and somehow that way of putting it enabled him to pull himself together.

We stood there—with me feeling wonderfully glad that I was outside the gate instead of inside, on the same property where a fine tragedy might occur at any moment. I was in a better position to run, I mean; and yet I was so excited that I wouldn't have been any farther away.

So we watched The Duster go down the path, even on the noisy gravel of it, his footfall making no more than a whisper.

He went up the porch and disappeared in the steep shadow of the veranda roof. Then, though we didn't hear or see another thing of him, somehow I knew that he had opened the screen door and entered the house.

Then the suspense grew terrible.

I've had the feeling that comes when a fighting man pulls a gun on you and aims down the barrel; that the time of waiting was very much like this.

I still wondered how he would go to work in the dark of that house. There were a lot of places that would probably have to be searched if he wanted to find the sleeping chamber of the great Manness.

We waited there, holding each other up, as you might say, on opposite sides of the gate.

All at once, fat Partridge said to me: "Look there, Baldy. I only planted those roses two years ago, and look at them now!"

Yes, that was what he actually said

as we stood there waiting for the noise of the battle.

And, right on the heels of this strange speech of his, there was the loud, hollow report of a revolver inside the house—the sound of a revolver and not of a rifle, because one can recognize a rifle shot by the metallic clangor of it.

There was that one shot, which made the hair lift on my head, and then a form slid out of a window there in front of the house, and slithered down the veranda roof, and toppled over the edge.

The shadow might be The Duster. It might be Manness. But it hung there with both hands from the echinus of one of the pillars, and then dropped to the path beneath.

It slumped down to the ground, and then fled around a corner of the house.

"Manness!" I said to Partridge. "It's Manness, and he's left The Duster dead in your house!"

Mrs. Partridge began to scream, then, inside the house; and both Partridge and I went on the run.

We let her shout, while we started searching for The Duster, and failed to find him; but in the door of one of the front bedrooms, now standing open, we found a little half-inch hole such as a .45-caliber slug would bore.

"The Duster isn't here," said Partridge, calmly enough. "Manness shot this bullet through the door and then ran for it, and between now and the morning they're going to meet somewhere, and have the thing out. I hope they kill each other, and be hanged to them both!"

He was pretty much himself, again, and I said to him: "Partridge, whatever happens, when your neighbors come spilling in here in another moment, all you know is that you heard a shot, and a man came out through that front window, and dropped to the ground, and ran. A burglar, you think, that had had a fight with his partner while they were actually about to loot the place. Is that straight? Or d'you want people to know that you've had Manness in your house?"

He turned a blinking, hostile eye on me, and then nodded.

"You're right," said he.

He looked as though he wanted to say still more. It was plain to see that, now he had recovered his nerve in the midst of some hot action, he hated me because of what I knew about him—or what he guessed that I knew!

At any rate, I know that I had an uncomfortable feeling in the small of my back when I turned away from him and started down the stairs, where Mrs. Partridge was still squawking foolishly.

From the head of the stairs, her husband said one word, not over loud, and she shut up as though a hand had been clapped over her mouth.

As I went out from the house, I was amazed because all the neighbors were not pouring in up the path, but, as a matter of fact, I suppose the noise of that shot, muffled inside the walls of the house, was not a quarter as loud as it had seemed to our straining ears at the garden gate.

I went down the path, with the water spray whispering like a ghost in the air and standing like a ghost against the stars, and out through that gate, and so down the street and straight for home. That is, if I could call the Ridley house home, but the days I had spent there with The Duster had been so exciting, and so crowded, that I felt about half my life had been heaped into that short space of time.

Going up the path through the trees, I had a new idea, and turning aside, I went out to look at the horses in the barn.

There was only one of the bays inside the shed, and the one that was missing was my Dolly mare.

So I could guess that the great Hec-

tor Manness, running for his life with the threat of a Thurlow behind him, had got out of the town on horseback, and The Duster had followed him, making a detour long enough to put himself in possession of the mare. He knew her speed and her heart, and her wise footing in bad going; no better horse than Dolly for a man hunt!

They were gone, the two of them.

It made me think of the world as a small place, and two giants galloping across the black, rough curve of it on the sky line.

And then I went to bed!

Well, there was no use in sitting up.

I lit the lamp and put it by my bed, and smoked a cigarette, and tried to read, but that was no good, for I still had to look up from the page.

So at last I blew the lamp out and fell asleep, dreaming of a battle between a cat and a snake, in which the snake had its coils around the body of the cat and the latter had its teeth in the throat of the viper.

Then I woke up, and saw a silhouette standing in the doorway.

It slid aside into the shadow beside that door, and I thought that I recognized that side-step.

Had Manness come back there?

Yes, to murder me, and so wipe out the other man who knew that he was alive!

And the great Duster lay dead, somewhere, and his body, perhaps, would never be found or buried!

I thought of those things, and all at once the fear left me, because, to tell you the truth, I felt so much grief that there was no room at all for fear left in me.

I got my gun with one sweep of the hand and slid out of the bed, when I heard a voice saying quietly:

"Don't shoot, Baldy."

It was The Duster, after all!

"Duster!" says I. "Duster!"

"Well?" says he, very dry.

That withered up my foolishness and made a man of me again.

"Maybe you'd like some coffee?" says I.

"Sure," says The Duster, "if there's any around."

I went and built up a fire in the kitchen stove—I remember that there was still a red coal among the ashes—and I soon had a big pot of coffee boiling.

The Duster stayed in the next room, and I could hear him moving about, and humming, but I didn't go in there, and he didn't come in to me.

Only when the coffee was ready, I carried the pot back in, and I had a couple of big tin mugs to drink it out of, because I guessed that we both needed it a good deal.

When I came in, the first thing I noticed was a black smudge on the forehead of The Duster. I gave it a good look, and knew that it was a powder burn.

"You must've had a back-fire, when you were out hunting squirrels with your shotgun," says I.

"As a matter of fact," says The Duster, "that's exactly what happened."

And he smiled at me.

Yah! That sent a shudder through me—his smile, I mean, and something sort of sleek and contented about him, like a cat that's been fed on fish, all it can eat.

I knew that he'd killed Hector Manness. I knew it so well that I didn't have to ask, and that Manness had come so near to killing him that the powder smudge on his face might have marked a bullet's passage through his brain instead.

He drank two cups of scalding coffee, one after another.

"Chuck's place shows what can be done with water," said he.

"Aye," says I, "it certainly is wonderful how he's made the things grow and cover up that sandy ground."

"Yes," says The Duster, "water's a great thing to cover up, or to carry away."

And that, believe it or not, is the only word that he ever said to me about the death of Manness, or just how it came about. And though I've eaten out my heart, many a time, to know, still I guess that my dream was just about right.

And what The Duster wanted me to know by his words was that the Christmas River was rolling the body of Hector Manness toward its cataracts and waterfalls.

EPILOGUE.

HOW to wind up, I hardly can tell. But I suppose that it would be more logical to carry along down to the time when we came to the ranch in the Big Bend.

There is plenty to tell about that life, and especially about that day when Muncie wired that The Duster was discharged on the spot, and how The Duster wired back saying: "Do you really prefer to have me join you in the North?"

Muncie did not prefer to have The Duster join him in the North, and a mighty wise man he was not to, because there would have been a gun on The Duster's hip when he made the trip.

He was wise for other reasons, as well, because although we had the big pinch, all right, and felt it to the bone, still we managed to pull through. The Duster's ignorance about cattle was a big handicap, but he was right in what he told Muncie—and a good hand with a revolver and a rifle was about what the ranch needed in that country, and in those days.

Well, I suppose that there is no use in talking about things in the Big Bend, though that's where the really interesting yarn begins, and where I can show you to-day as fine a gang of Herefords as ever clacked hoof or mooed at the calf pen. But the way that people are raised and the way that they read books, they've got into the habit of thinking that a marriage is the end of things and not the beginning. Though every day we can see that marriages start a lot of stuff—stuff that can't be finished by those that begin the fight, as you might say! However, I can't tell about the days in the Big Bend, because you wouldn't like to carry on that far, and you want to know how The Duster married Marguerite Lamont.

Well, you know already.

Of course, the whole town was there, but the big sensation was not the real wedding, I think.

The Duster had had a talk with his father-in-law before the wedding, and when he marched down that church aisle, who was behind him as his best man?

Why, it shocked people breathless, but of course you've guessed already. Yes, it was Renney!

But even that wasn't the biggest shock.

For just before the ceremony began, somebody noticed a youngish, tallish boy, mighty brown in the face, standing in a corner.

"By the jumping Lord Harry!" says the man next to me. "If that ain't Tommy Lamont!"

Yes, it was Tommy, and not back in defiance of the law, either.

He'd come there to Christmas because that same Sheriff Renney had seen the governor and because the governor was a white man, and understood that Renney knew best. So back came Tommy Lamont with a grave, brown, young face, and stood there in the corner, worshiping his pretty sister, but loving The Duster even more.

Well, I don't see why I should spread myself on account of the wedding, and the flowers, and the talk of the town, and all the sort of things that newspapers write on such occa-

sions. The Christmas paper has that account, and you can read it there.

The really amazing thing was the way that The Duster softened up when the pinch came, and hardly played the man at all.

"Stay close to me, Baldy," says he.

"Why," says I, "you're turning yellow!"

"I need a drink," says he.

"You better have one, then," says I.

He gave me a look.

"And meet her with a dizzy head? No, no, Baldy, from this minute I need all my wits—in order," says he, "to walk straight."

I knew what he meant. It was a neat way to put it.

Well, he was as white as a sheet when he went down the aisle, and everybody noticed it.

"How noble he looks!" I heard a goose of a woman say as we went by.

He did, though, and when he had put on the ring, and they were tied firm and tight by the words of Lamont, and he had given the girl to The Duster with his own hands, why, sir, The Duster was so shaking that he could hardly manage to face her!

"Kiss her, you loon!" says I.

Which he finally done, but Marguerite, which she was as cool as you please, and like a child playing a game and mighty happy at it, she heard what I had said, and over the shoulder of The Duster she gives me her sweetest smile.

"Thank you, Baldy," says she.

Now the church business was finished and we all got out, and went by the big, loose, smiling face of Chuck Partridge, who had cleaned his garden plumb out of flowers in honor of that day. And we got home to Lamont's shack, and there we had supper together. I mean, the boys, and Lamont, and me, because The Duster and Margie didn't count much, except to one another.

It was a good meal, though the venison had been left a mite too long in the Dutch oven. It was good, though.

And I remember toward the end, I was telling a story about my first job as a straw boss, and as I made a pause before coming to the main point, I hear The Duster saying softly to Marguerite:

"Darling, when did you first care for me?"

Well, it sickened me.

I mean, the idea of a man like The Duster making such a plumb fool of himself, like any young jackass who didn't know how to act.

I took a quick look over at the girl, expecting to see her laugh at him, and tell him to be his age, but not at all!

No, sir, her head was raised and tilted back a little, and she was looking at the moon, you might say, and her eyes were like a soft-blue mist.

"I know when it was," she said. "Oh, always from the first moment I saw you, dear, but most of all, finally, when I saw you standing with your head bent at the grave of your poor friend, Hector Manness! That made me love you, John, because I knew from that moment how gentle and kind you were at heart!"

Camp Grub

By Seth Ranger

Author of "Shining Deer," etc.

BOTH "Hardrock" Shipley, and his partner, "Poke" Tupper, were suffering from a serious attack of cabin fever. This malady comes from too long and too close association between two or three men. Hardrock was sick of looking at Poke's face, and Poke didn't think Hardrock's face was anything to be preserved with oil and canvas. Poke had told him so. As a result, they were taking large doses of the only known remedy for cabin fever—a good fist fight. Poke swung a hard left at Hardrock, and missed. While Poke was off balance, the little Irishman started a blow from his knees and caught Poke full on the jaw. Poke crashed to the floor amid the wreckage of the cabin furnishings. Hardrock was surprised, so was Poke. Hardrock hovered over the semiconscious Poke, waiting for him to get up so he could hit him again. Poke rubbed his eyes and tried to understand just why it was that Hardrock appeared to have three jaws, each covered with a fringe of red whiskers. The outlook was promising. If Hardrock had three jaws, Poke certainly should be able to hit one of them as soon as he got to his feet so he could swing.

As Hardrock shifted, so Poke's gaze shifted and finally it came to rest on the partnership calendar. Poke's vision cleared slowly. Presently the figures took definite form. In order to keep track of the time, they had formed the habit of crossing off each day. Poke seemed pained to discover how few remaining days there were in the month. "Sufferin' malemutes!" he exclaimed, "look at the date!"

Hardrock stepped back a safe distance and looked at the calendar. "My gosh!" he exclaimed, "how time does fly."

The late difficulty was forgotten. "If we're going to get there before it's too late," Poke said, "we'd better load up

with grub this afternoon and hit the trail the first thing in the morning."

Hardrock considered thoughtfully. "Maybe we hadn't better go after all, Poke. Maybe we should hang around here and see if we can't talk some of these young fellows into mushing over to Quartz Creek and doing some of the dead work on our mine. If we don't, then we won't have much of a prospect to show those Eastern men when they come out next summer."

"I suppose that's so," Poke agreed; "but—dog-gone it all—I hate to pass this trip up! Can't we kill two birds with one stone?"

Hardrock's eyes sparkled. "Poke! About once in a blue moon you grab an idear right out of thin air. We'll make one more attempt to talk those young cusses into mushing over to Quartz Creek and putting in a season's work. If they won't do it, then we'll try other methods."

It was Poke who went immediately to Ben Paris' Pool Hall where miners out of work during the winter period often whiled away the time. His appraising eye fell on Milo Hunt, who was built like a brick house and could outwork any man in the country when he was in the mood. The trouble with Hunt was, he was seldom in the mood. He wanted to strike it rich some time, and his idea of the method was to fall down on a gravel bar some day and come up with a fistful of nuggets.

Poke got to the point at once. "Milo! Why not take up our offer to drive a tunnel into that prospect on Quartz Creek? We've got a cabin there, stocked with grub—danged good grub, if anybody should ask you. There's plenty of powder in the powder house and plenty of steel. There's a forge and anvil to sharpen the steel; in fact, everything is ready for a small crew. And we'll give you top wages."

Milo grinned. "It's a tough mush over there to Quartz Creek," he said, "and this looks like a hard winter. Besides, Poke, there's more money in watching wise boys like you and Hardrock. When you strike, it's a good plan to follow and stake the ground next to what you stake. A fellow is bound to strike it that way."

"I'll say this much for you," Poke replied, "you don't beat around the bush. You admit you're just waiting to cash in on the experience it has taken us many years to acquire. But—fair enough."

Poke was smiling broadly when he joined Hardrock. "Nothing doing, Hardrock," he said, "Milo Hunt is waiting for something to turn up."

"And it's young men like that that I like to hang the Indian sign on," Hardrock growled. "Well—here goes!"

They threw a pack on Tabasco, the mushing mule, and headed back to Big Nugget. Usually the pair boldly made their way down the main street. This time they purposely followed an alley, but they did so in a manner that made it possible for Milo Hunt to catch a fleeting glimpse of the mule.

Hunt leaped to his feet. "Say, boys, something's up! Hardrock and Poke are sneaking down the alley. One of you slip down and see if they stop at Benson's Trading Post and take on a load of trail grub. If they do, it means one thing and one thing only—a winter stampede. They're pretty wise, trying to chase us off to Quartz Creek, while they sneak away to a real strike! Pretty wise, but your Uncle Milo was a couple of thinks ahead of them that time."

A committee of three young men strolled casually down the alley, taking advantage of a flurry of snow to conceal their movements. There was no doubt of it—Hardrock and Poke were taking on a load of trail grub. The trio made a bee line for their respective cabins. Dog teams were hurriedly harnessed, equipment made ready, and

an hour after Hardrock and Poke had left Benson's, Milo Hunt and his partners were taking on trail grub. Benson thereupon sat up and took notice. So did several others about the place. "A winter stampede, eh?" they cried. "Where?"

Not desiring to add to the competition, Hunt and his men merely looked mysterious and said nothing. This was the signal for a half dozen others to leg it for their cabins and make ready for the trail. The restaurant keeper at Big Nugget swore with feeling. "Just my luck! A few days before Thanksgiving and somebody starts a stampede!"

"You've no kick coming," a sour dough retorted, "you've been running your hash house for years, and not once, either Christmas or Thanksgiving, have you served turkey. And us willing to pay five to ten dollars apiece for a turkey dinner." He hurried to buy up a dog team before some owner heard of the stampede.

By the following day the stampede was on in full force. Stalking was no longer necessary. A well-marked trail showed the route the leaders had taken.

Hardrock and Poke appeared to ignore their followers. "I ain't so sure but what we made a mistake after all," Poke suggested, "sorta decoying this bunch of heavy-eatin' roughnecks. They may get there ahead of us."

"They won't know where we're going until we get over the mountains," Hardrock answered, "so we don't need to worry until then. After that, it's every man for himself, and I'd like to see the dog team that can beat Tabasco on the kind of trail we'll have over the hump."

The hump Hardrock referred to was a steep climb and a hard mush through an icy pass. The wind roared through with such fury as to almost lift a man off his feet. Again and again sour doughs and their teams were blown back.

It was while the pair were fighting their way, a foot at a time, that the others actually overtook them. Hardrock swore with feeling. "We're breaking trail for the whole mob," he rasped, "and they resting for the final dash. Poke, we made a mistake. You're idea wasn't so hot, as the feller says."

"Nothing so hot around here right now, but there's going to be plenty hot at the end of the trail. Get along there, Tabasco, it'll be easier on the other side."

They made it at last, with half the population of Big Nugget on their heels. A snow-filled gulch ran from the pass into the lower country. The whole crust had frozen, and now the lighter dog teams swung into the lead. With mushers digging in and holding back, the dogs began the steep descent. Outfit after outfit hit the bottom on the dead run, while here and there a tangle of harness, sled, and dogs indicated that some one had come to grief.

Somewhere over the horizon ran a mighty river into which flowed Quartz Creek and hundreds of others. Quartz Creek was a hundred miles to the right and north. To the left and south lay Medford Creek.

"We've got 'em guessing!" Poke exclaimed. "They don't know which way to turn."

"They will when we reach the bottom—if we ever do," said Hardrock with a grunt.

Tabasco, after the manner of his kind, was suspicious. And his suspicions were well founded. He broke through the crust and in his efforts to regain his feet started an avalanche. Higher and higher piled the snow as it rushed downward. Those at the bottom fled in every direction. As Hardrock and Poke followed the mule to the bottom they got an occasional glimpse of hoofs, ears, and tail. The

slide came to a slow stop. For a moment nothing happened.

"We've lost our mule," Hardrock groaned.

"Maybe, but remember it's an army mule and they die hard," Poke reminded him. "See! What did I tell you?"

With only a piece of harness remaining, Tabasco struggled to the surface. With a mighty snort, he cleared his nostrils of snow. Then he was off. Some of the pack had broken loose, but the main portion was there, badly damaged, but held in place by a good old diamond hitch.

"There goes our outfit!" yelled Hardrock. "Somebody head him off!"

By a series of dodging that would have done credit to a star open-field runner on a football field the big mule eluded capture and disappeared in the direction of Medford Creek. Hardrock and Poke broke into a dog trot. The mushers below went into conference. "Are they chasing the mule or going on the stampede?" one asked.

"We don't know, and we can't take a chance," Milo Hunt answered. "Well, dog-gone 'em! They're taking to the roughest ground they can find."

Hardrock and Poke looked back after bucking their way through a tangle of snow-covered niggerheads. Drivers were shouting at dogs; sleds were skidding, and loads were slipping off. The pair having the advantage increased their pace.

"Never mind, boys," Milo said, "our turn will come. They haven't any outfit. They'll have to come to us for grub. About to-morrow noon they'll be looking for a square meal and—— Say, do you know what day to-morrow is? It's Thanksgiving!"

"Ugh!" one of them grunted. "Frozen moose meat instead of turkey. And for the last five years I've faithfully promised my stomach turkey on Thanksgiving. Sour dough flapjacks instead of spuds; bacon grease instead of butter! Outside, they'll be trying to decide whether they'll have punkin' or mince pie. There'll be cramberries and——"

"Shut up," ordered Milo, "or you'll have me crying!"

They managed to hang on until Hardrock and Poke made camp. Two such old trail-blazers as that pair never trusted sleeping bags nor all their grub to an animal's back. They carried such important items on their own backs.

Alone, they made camp and drank tea. They slept soundly and got off to such an early start that the others hit the trail on empty stomachs. As the partners neared Medford Creek the country changed. Dog teams passed the two tired old miners on the dead run.

Hardrock groaned. "Poke, I'm afraid they've beat us to it! Watch 'em! Are they heading for Medford Creek?"

"Yeah! There they go! Look, they're scattering. Hurry, we've got to head off those swinging downstream."

With a frantic effort, the partners regained some of their lost ground. Hardrock's short legs were almost a blur as he ran. Flesh and blood had a limit, and Hardrock had reached his. "Leave your pack, Poke, and run. I'll get in somehow," he said.

Poke spilled his stuff in the snow and settled down for a neck-and-neck race with Milo Hunt. "You might have beat me in your younger days, Poke, but you can't now," Milo grinned. "That ground at the bend looks good to me."

"I'll—take—that—that's—just beyond," Poke panted. "See you later!"

It was three hours later that Milo Hunt saw Poke Tupper. "Sorry, Poke, to nose you out," he said, "but in this country it's every man for himself and the devil take the hindermost, as the feller says. I don't know what's in the ground I've staked, but I know I've staked it."

But Poke did not answer. He was

watching a familiar object coming slowly through the brush. A moose, seeing the same object, bolted in terror; a caribou bounded lightly from view. The wild creatures of that particular district were seeing a mule for the first time. "Gol darn him," Poke growled, "he's pulled that stunt before! Shakes us, loses our outfit, then comes back and gives us the laugh."

"And that," said Milo, "gives us the laugh. If you want a Thanksgiving dinner, and that goes for Hardrock, too, come around and see us later on in the day. You can have it if you'll give us as good a dance as we gave you trying to keep up with us through the niggerheads."

Poke and Hardrock, who had just arrived, pretended to be mildly surprised. "We weren't making you dance, we were just trying to beat you to a Thanksgiving dinner."

"What?" Milo and his partners fairly bellowed the word. "Didn't you stake what ground we left on Medford Creek?"

"Gosh, no!" Poke replied. "We were only interested in beating you to the river steamer *Nancy Lane*. The freeze-up caught her halfway up the river. She's wintering off the mouth of Medford Creek, and she's got a hundred turkeys and all the fixin's for a Thanksgiving dinner aboard. Come on, can't you smell it?"

From over a low ridge came the aroma of roast turkey, as a steamer's oven was opened and closed.

"The dinner is on us," Hardrock said, "and it might interest you to know that we've bought all the turkeys they have aboard. We figure to ship 'em down the river to our Quartz Creek property, camp grub for the boys who are going to work for us this winter."

"That's fine," Poke whispered, "but we'd better sign 'em up now while they can smell it. It'll be harder—after they're full of it." Poke spread out a book and eagerly extended a fountain pen. "Make it quick, before the ink freezes."

Milo Hunt was the first to sign.

A GHOST TOWN FOR SALE

THERE was a time when the town of West Eminence, Missouri, rejoiced in a population of several thousand. But those were the days when the lumber industry was the mainspring of the prosperity of this little Ozark settlement. Gradually, however, the timber disappeared from the hillsides. And with it went the sawmills, and the workers, and their families.

Now there remains only a so-called ghost city. The original townsite of fifteen thousand acres of rather stumpy ground is, however, still intact. And the owners have expressed themselves anxious to sell this site, plus such items as a small railroad, a hotel, and a store, for the sum of fifteen thousand dollars. This would make the price less even than a dollar an acre.

Cowboy Quest

By George Gilbert

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

BERENICE MORGAN lends her horse to a traveler whose mount is exhausted. Later she learns from the sheriff that he is Kylie Westdell, wanted for murder. From Rosita, a former servant, comes word that it is safe for Berenice to return to Hacienda Del Sol, from which her widowed mother has been driven by the bandit El Matador. Berenice goes to Mexico, and meets Westdell, who warns her not to proceed. She taunts him as a killer, and he joins El Matador. The latter poses as a patriot, but soon reveals himself in his true colors; not, however, before Westdell has saved him from El Lobo. Berenice stays at Pedro Delgado's house en route to the Hacienda Del Sol. El Matador and Westdell arrive there. The bandit orders Westdell, with an escort, to accompany Berenice to Del Sol, ostensibly on account of the disturbed state of the country.

CHAPTER VII.

HACIENDA DEL SOL.

"YOU will please make haste," Westdell ordered. The girl looked at him defiantly. Delgado and his wife stared at her in astonishment.

"Señora, see that the young lady is ready to ride immediately," Westdell ordered At once the fat woman seized the girl by one wrist. Delgado took the other. For a moment she fought, then yielded, with a slight shrug of her shoulders.

"There, that's better," Westdell remarked, as they went out of the room together. He heard them in the other rooms, then they came back, the girl having discarded the shawl and again donned her riding costume. Her eyes were firmly set against Westdell, who laughed as the man from the escort remarked upon her quick change of clothing.

"See if the troop is ready," Westdell ordered sharply. The subordinate

glanced at him with appreciation of the quality of one who could deliver orders in such a tone of superiority. Then he went out. He came in soon to report that the men were mounted and ready.

"Come, señorita," Westdell ordered brusquely; "your horse is waiting."

"He has been forced to go far during the day; he is hardly fit for the trail," she replied.

"That does not signify, señorita! You have heard the orders of our chief, El Matador. Hasten, then," decisively.

She went with him. He grasped her arm roughly and forced her through the passage leading to the door. There they found that her saddle and bridle had been put on one of the extra horses the rebel soldiers had. Her own tired horse was to be left. An extra horse had been saddled for Westdell. He asked by whose order this had been done and was told that El Matador had selected a mount for him, that the one he had ridden from Agua Dulce might travel light and so not be worn down by too hard work being required of him.

"El Matador is kind," Westdell remarked loudly; "he is like a father to his children, the soldiers of his band."

"You seem to like your own kind," Berenice said bitterly.

He did not reply.

"Where is my horse?" he asked; "the one I rode from Agua Dulce here?"

"A boy has him and will ride with him and other led horses behind the troop," answered the man El Matador had spoken to inside the house. "The led horses are all in the shed now and will start some time after we do."

"I am going to examine my horse; I thought he picked up a stone as we rode and he may turn lame. A glance at his hoof will set my mind at ease. Delgado," said Westdell loudly, "attend with a lantern!"

In a moment Delgado came with a lantern made of pierced tin, in which a candle burned. This Westdell took, after cautioning the troopers to be careful of the prisoner. In the shed he found the lad who was to lead the horses. He was curled in a corner, fast asleep. Westdell examined the hoof of the horse a moment, then put the lantern behind the door, in a way that let its light shine as if he were right there holding it. He had espied a small door in the end of the stable and this he opened. It let him out alongside a stack of straw. He skirted this and went along the wall of the house. Now he could hear the men of the troop talking. One, whom he recognized as the man to whom El Matador had spoken in the house, was saying:

"Pedro, you are right. This new man has made a dramatic start with the chief, but who really knows about him?"

"Escobar, the chief does not take strangers without providing for their future. Who is to watch this new man?"

"Surely not Escobar," the man replied, with a laugh that meant: "Surely Escobar."

"You are clever at that, Escobar."

Westdell stole back to the shed, sure now that his suspicions had been correct. El Matador had set Escobar as a spy over him and, no doubt, had some one set as a spy over Escobar. Westdell had worked in Mexico long enough to know that in politics few men trusted each other, and that among the bandit groups the sharpest kind of politics was rampant.

He came back to the troop swinging the lantern and laughing:

"I find that my horse is not lame. Now, forward!"

They swung out of the Delgado yard easily, the girl in their midst. Westdell rode at her side, but did not speak. He knew she was weary. She had been in the saddle much of the day and had had but a few hours of rest. He admired her firm seat on her horse and the way she kept her shoulders squared back.

He stole glances at her in the dark. Not a few times he felt the electric contact of glance on glance and knew she was doing the same with him. He noted, too, that the men of the troop kept closely around them, as if, indeed, there were two prisoners, instead of one. A half moon came up half an hour after they had left the Delgado house, giving ample light to travel by.

"I am so newly with you that I am not acquainted," Westdell called to the escort. "Pray, who was the man who came into the Delgado house and who was treated with such high regard by our great chief, El Matador?"

"I, Escobar, Felipe Escobar," he called.

"Escobar. A name high in Mexico's annals, I am sure."

"I perceive you have a good idea of things," Escobar said complacently, working his way through the troop to Westdell's right side.

"You will present the other men to me at a convenient opportunity, Señor Escobar?"

"With pleasure, Señor Tejano."

"And this Del Sol, is it far?"

"At dawn we should be there, Señor Tejano."

"A night in the saddle is not the best way to spend it, and yet, to ride thus with brave companions and in a good cause is not bad, Escobar?"

"Not bad."

So, by flattery and rough comradeship, Westdell began to establish himself with the men. Pedro, he found, was a rough-and-ready old bandit, grizzled. His last name was not mentioned. He was called simply Pedro or "Pedro, the Goat."

The girl held her distance from him firmly. He did not, indeed, force himself upon her attention. But he did move toward her as they rode. She worked her horse off at one side quietly. She seemed to tolerate close riding from the others more than she did from him, as if she had an especial aversion to even having the skirts of her saddle touch him in passing.

They were following a trail that they all seemed to know well. The moon slid up toward mid-sky and still they jogged onward. Westdell had to admire, too, the quality of those bandit horses, picked from the corrals of a whole wide region. The one he was on seemed made of wire and springs. No great burst of speed was called for; it was the familiar trail-shuffle all the time, a gait hard on the rider who is not used to that pace, but easiest on the horse that has been trained to it. Sometimes the men sang lilting melodies of raids and battles; sometimes they sang of love and, softest of all, of home, for those irregular fighters had left some little rancheria or tiny desert-border village, and each of them loved it still.

Westdell kept up a running fire of talk with Escobar and Pedro, at times matching wits with some of the others. He did not speak to the girl.

The dawn came to slay the stars. They were swinging along a shelf of land laid against a mountain. Below, the mists still lingered. Westdell heard cattle bellowing and a stallion whistled a challenge to the cavalcade. They turned a corner in the trail along the narrow shelf and then they were in a valley that split the mountains. The valley was wide and green, and Westdell knew that the canyon stream that fed it had been tapped and turned here and there in trickles through a system of irrigation ditches. The white-walled buildings were on a knoll dominating the scene, its crest far above all danger of flood from the canyon, should a cloud-burst come tearing down from the heights with its foam-fronted menace of death and destruction.

"La Hacienda Del Sol," Escobar announced.

"A nice place for our band to repose," Westdell said.

The girl cast on him a glance of withering scorn, but he only laughed at her and then turned to talk with Escobar again.

They came to the *casa* at a swinging lope, using all the latent energy of the horses to do so. As they came in, the lad with the led horses overtook them, and other young lads came from near-by stables, on the alert to take charge of the horses of the whole troop.

"I require a room for this prisoner," Westdell announced loudly; "send me the one in charge here."

"Señora Rosita, the chief's wife, is at breakfast," one of the lads told him, and darted away to carry the message.

Berenice, upon swinging from her saddle, had seemed to reel, but she recovered poise. She was weary, but she kept her chin up still, and her eyes shone with that indomitable light that does not recognize defeat.

At that reference to "Señora Rosita," however, she started, and her face looked pale. In a moment the lad was back and said that Señora Bustamente would receive them in the *casa,* as she had finished her fruit and coffee. He pointed to the main door, and Westdell, with Escobar, the girl between them, advanced toward it. A soft-footed Indian servant showed them a door and they entered. Berenice Morgan stared.

"What do you want?" Rosita demanded arrogantly. "I do not like to be disturbed when I am having my morning collation."

She was in a high-backed chair of mahogany, with an expensive lace shawl about her shoulders. Her hair was done in a high coiffure and in it were several pins that Berenice recognized as having belonged to her mother. The shawl was her mother's, filched from some store chest in the linen room. Rosita looked at Berenice insolently and laughed:

"So, you come home? You had my letter? It came in well that you taught me the hand-of-write? Often I swallowed my rage when I saw you in silks and lace, while I, Rosita, far more handsome, went barefoot and in cotton rags. Now it is my turn. My man is chief of this region. You are his prisoner, it seems. Take her to some room in the east wing of the *casa,* lock her up well, and hold her."

Westdell bowed and grasped Berenice by the arm.

"Come," he ordered; "it is time to obey now."

But Berenice resisted him, speaking with angry insistence:

"Then all that pretense of an escort to save me from attack by bandits was to deceive and get me away from towns and into the hills, into the complete control of El Matador?" she asked, scorn and rage contending for the mastery in her tones.

"Sometimes a ruse is useful, señorita," Westdell replied, in tones of irony.

"You are new with El Matador?" Rosita demanded, now gazing fully at Westdell for the first time. Till then her eyes had been all for the girl with the red hair, light-blue eyes, and dimpled chin and cheeks. Envy of the American girl shone in her dark orbs. In the presence of Berenice, Rosita was again just a common hill-girl, a splendid creature of dusky rose and fire, and she knew it well. Hence she wished the red-haired girl out of sight.

Escobar took Berenice's other arm and together they led her out of the room. Escobar knew the way to the east wing. He seemed well acquainted with the *casa.* He found a room that he said was strong, and had but one window and that barred. It had been used to lock up servants accused of petty crimes in former times, he said. He had worked for Del Sol once, he added.

Into this room Berenice Morgan was thrust, a prisoner in the home where she had lived so long as a princess of a wide domain. There was a low stool in one

corner and a framed truckle-bed, on which were a few rags of covering.

"Don't try to escape," Westdell said sharply, as he gave her a final thrust inward. "Come, Escobar, we'll lock her up, put a man on guard before the door, and see if we cannot have something to eat before we rest ourselves."

"You are the man to handle a woman," Escobar praised him, as they left, after posting the stolid sentry. "That is the way to do it. As for me, I am too sentimental and soft. Women always rule me."

"They do not rule me; harsh and cold, that is the way to treat any woman." Westdell spoke loud enough for the girl to hear in her prison.

Her voice came after them:

"You are a fit companion for the killer and his gang, Westdell."

CHAPTER VIII.

JEALOUSY.

COMING to the big room of the *casa,* Westdell found that Señora Bustamente was waiting for him. One of the men of the troop was leaving. She signed to Westdell to approach the mahogany chair where she sat, as a queen enthroned in splendor. She had added to the jewels about her person. She smiled winningly at both Escobar and Westdell, but the real warmth of her smile was for the Tejano. He waited to see what course her talk would take. She began:

"You are too modest, Señor Tejano. I have learned from another that your sure aim saved El Matador from assassination in Agua Dulce last night. Why did you not inform me of the affair?"

"It was nothing, señora," waving it aside gracefully.

"But no! It was a great thing to me. He who saves the man of a woman's heart saves her life. Break your fast with me, señors."

She clapped her hands. Soft-footed Indian girls came in with salvers bearing chocolate, cakes, cold meats, and fruit. Escobar's eyes glittered. He nudged Westdell with his elbow and whispered that they were in fine luck. Giving his attention to the rich food, he began to gobble voraciously. Westdell ate sparingly, although Rosita tried to get him to eat of everything freely. The cups of hot chocolate were beginning to have their effect upon Escobar, however. The night in the cool air without sleep, coming after a previous day of full activity, also had its influence. Escobar, his hunger satisfied, gulped a final cup of chocolate, and then began to nod. He checked himself several times as Westdell and Rosita chatted; the Texan was telling of his meeting with the smiling man at Del Rio and his travels thence to join El Matador, and she was listening in childlike wonder. She had never been away from that foothill ranch in the Mexican interior. To her, it was plain, El Matador was a great man, the greatest she had ever seen, surely. Westdell fortified her in that belief, praising him highly. He talked thus quietly, and her voice matched his. Suddenly the expected happened. Escobar began to snore. He was on a low settee covered with plaited rawhide. He had put down salver and hat. He slept heavily. At once Westdell put his finger to his lips, and Rosita stared at him.

"Señora," he whispered, "your reception here has touched my heart," and he laid his hand on it with dramatic effect.

Rosita permitted herself a smile of superior wisdom and benignity. This Tejano, coming from afar, was paying homage to her position as spouse of the great man, Bustamente! The men of El Matador's band had paid slight attention to her, beyond formal politeness. Rosita knew that behind her back the Indians were laughing at her, for she made many mistakes in customs and

manners in trying to play the great lady of the hacienda. But this new man was taking her at her own estimation. Now he began to whisper again, with one eye cocked upon Escobar:

"Señora, a thought comes to me with regard to you and El Matador, a thought greatly disturbing to me, señora."

"And that is?" Her face overshadowed with anxiety at once.

"It is this. This thin, lanky, washed-out American girl is not to be compared with you in any way."

"You pay me a great compliment, Señor Tejano."

"But one deserved, señora. Attend, then, please. El Matador has a keen eye, may we say, for beauty? Did he not select you?"

"Yes," anxiously.

"And this American girl may attract him."

Rosita paled. She regarded the Texan intently as he went on:

"She does not like El Matador. She proved that at Delgado's house near Agua Dulce last night. For she will never forgive him because he has taken her mother's hacienda for his headquarters. Watch her, we may be able to get her away. Advise him to shut her up elsewhere. In fact, señora," letting his voice drop lower yet, "very much may depend upon this. If the American Government is appealed to by her family, it will cause a great stir. A Federal army may even be sent into these mountains and foothills. As a lieutenant, I cannot speak my mind to our chief, but you may be able to say the right word at the right time."

"I shall counsel him to give up his project, in which she is a principal part," Rosita said, deeply moved; "he counts upon obtaining a large cash ransom for her release."

"All that could be done without directly bringing blame onto El Matador. Attend, then, señora! Have her moved to some secure place in the mountains and there kept under guard of faithful ones, unharmed by any one."

"*Si,* señor," eagerly.

"It might be done in a way that would let Señorita Morgan think El Matador not to blame for detaining her. He could release her, then she could be captured by some men strange to her, but faithful to El Matador."

Rosita, her eyes wide with the importance of her reasoning powers in following this intricate plan, nodded assent to his ideas.

"The ransom could be collected, and she released, and in a way that would bring no discredit upon El Matador, but would fill his coffers with gold."

Again Rosita nodded, saying:

"It shall be done. I can turn El Matador when no one else can. Listen to that fellow snore!"

Escobar, in fact, had become extremely vocal in his slumbers. With a grimace of disgust, Rosita gathered her lacy wraps and skirts about her and went to the door, saying:

"Repose yourself, then, brave Tejano, while I make sure that your men are well cared for by the people of La Hacienda Del Sol."

So she went out into the hall. The Texan at once stretched out on another settle, across the room from that used by Escobar. Westdell sighed and relaxed fully, and in a few moments was fast asleep. With the arousing of jealousy in the heart of Rosita, he seemed to find relief from an anxiety that had been eating at his heart ever since Berenice had passed him on the road from Del Rio to Agua Dulce.

As for Rosita, she went, indeed, outside and issued orders for the care of the men of the troop; but she then came into the *casa* and after glancing at the sleeping men, went to the wing where Berenice Morgan was. She nodded to the sentry and peeped through the sliding lattice in the door. She saw the beautiful girl in there, sleeping on the

truckle-bed like a child. She watched with fiercely glowing eyes and then turned away, her heart torn with jealousy against this woman with the red-gold hair, the white skin, and the eyes of blue. None knew better than she how soon El Matador could become smitten with one woman after tiring of another, and she felt that he was tiring of her.

CHAPTER IX.

PART OF A PLAN.

AS a cat does, Westdell awoke all at once. He sat up, passed his hand over his belt and gun, straightened his clothing, slapped his hat against his knee, and ran his fingers through his brown, crisp-curled hair. Escobar was gone. He heard voices outside and strolled quietly down the passage to the main door of the *casa*. Before the entrance the men of the troop sprawled, chattering gaily. True sons of the sun, they were now at ease with the great, blazing orb of day warming them. They greeted him lazily, with eyes half for each other. The ride of the night before had been carried out in accordance with a direct order from El Matador. The new lieutenant had acted as ordered. Now he would have to order for himself. Escobar grinned, as he sat on a low bench against the wall.

"Is the prisoner safe, Escobar?" Westdell demanded sharply.

"Quién sabe?" Escobar replied, flicking the ashes off his cigarette. He laughed a little. Westdell's eyes blazed. With a leap, he was at the sleek one's side and had him by the shoulder. Escobar's hand moved, but he was in an iron grip. The others sprang to their feet. Escobar staggered across the open space. The Tejano had his gun and it was menacing the crowd:

"Escobar, I am leader of this troop. Remember it! Here is your gun. Use it, if you dare!"

He threw the gun to Escobar, who caught it and stood glaring. Eye met eye and slowly that of Escobar fell. He glanced aside and all around.

"Are the horses cared for?" Westdell demanded.

The men did not reply.

"If I inspect the horses in half an hour and find one not clean and well cared for, punishment will be given the man who neglected his duty."

Escobar slipped his gun into its holster. They all started with him toward the stables. Westdell called:

"Have my horse cleaned, saddled, and ready to ride at once! Let me know when he is ready. Do not trust the care of your horses to raw stableboys; see to them yourselves. At any time you may need a good horse to ride for life or to serve our glorious chief."

He sat on the bench before the house. The door opened and Rosita came out, her eyes glowing with admiration:

"Señor, thanks. Always when El Matador is away, the men are lazy and out of discipline. Only he can make them obey. But now you carry off the burden of leadership well. Use them harshly and they will respect you."

"Señora, I kiss my hand to you. El Matador is lucky in having as his wife one so discerning and brave."

This broad compliment was of the sort calculated to appeal to the hill-girl, snatched from obscurity into temporary power and riches by the caprice of the bandit chieftain. Her own people had not given her credit for her rise in fortune; her father had cast her off; she knew that Señora Morgan and her daughter would always despise her. But this strong, bold man, this handsome rider, showered praises on her. Rosita liked it, and showed that she liked it.

"And the prisoner, señora, she is contented?" asked Westdell.

"A man has kept close watch over her. She had slept and has eaten and seems well. I myself shall keep close watch over her."

"And see that no one harms her?"

She nodded. She was swathed in a rich shawl of filmy black lace. In her black braids were great beaded pins of Indian jewel-work—silver, and lapis, and bloodstone, and sard. A white silken gown, sashed with pink ribbon, set off her dark beauty to perfection. Her large hands and feet made apparent her low birth, but her fingers were circled by golden rings set with jewels and on her feet were doeskin moccasins beaded with seed pearls and set off with diamond buckles. Of the value of all these things she had little knowledge, but that they had been worn by the great señora she knew, and she wished to stand in the shoes of the great señora in all things.

Westdell saluted her with deep respect and went toward the stable yard. Here the men were cleaning the horses briskly. He ran his eye over them. At the corner of the low shed was a huge horse of rare lines, a black. He was all ready to mount. His bridle chains jingled and his saddle shone with silver-work. Westdell heard one of the troopers say to another:

"Every morning she has the black saddled, but she does not ride often. It is all part of her way of making men work for her, just because she is the wife of El Matador. Do we not remember when she ran about barefooted and carried baskets of garlic on her back and milked goats for her father?"

"Yes, and all day the black will stand there, fighting flies in the sun, and she will not ride him. He is a prize of a horse, able to outfoot all others here, except that brute of a coyote that El Matador keeps for himself."

Westdell did not let them see that he had overheard them. His approach had been unnoticed. He announced himself with a cough and watched them for a moment. His own horse had been cleaned and polished till it shone.

Now a stable-boy came leading a horse that Westdell knew at once for the great coyote of El Matador. This horse of neutral color, of line-back stripe, of high-arching neck, great chest, and springlike limbs, with eyes wide-placed and nostrils belled, pranced at the end of a long lead rope. Westdell's eyes were greedy for him. He heard Rosita call from a window in the *casa* and turned toward her. She was pointing to the horse.

"El Matador wishes him exercised daily. Ride him, Señor Tejano. The riders here fear him and so do the soldiers."

The stable-boy glanced inquiringly at Westdell, who told him to make the coyote ready to ride.

"That is easy enough, señor, but once in the saddle, beware. He will not let any one but El Matador ride him."

"I have the orders of the señora to carry out; make him ready."

Westdell watched as the boy obeyed. The horse seemed eager and anxious to go under saddle and to take the bridle bit. He sniffed at Westdell without a show of anger when he approached to take the slack of the reins. With a clean leap, Westdell was in the saddle, his knees clamped like iron. The coyote shivered, then exploded. The stable yard was wide and long. The coyote began to gyrate, then to walk a-beaming. He reared, he started to throw himself over backward. The loaded quirt came down between his eyes and he yielded and fell forward. He was jerked up and now struck on all fours and began to run.

The coyote darted out of the stable yard with the speed of the wind itself. He careened over the flat space before the *casa* and far back along the bench trail by which Westdell had arrived the night before. The coyote went fast, varying this by spells of pitching. But always that weight came down on his back and always he failed. Finally he quit, and Westdell admired him because

he did not fight to exhaustion but recognized that he had been topped by one who could not be thrown. He did not sulk, or go weak. He just accepted Westdell and let himself be turned and jogged back to the *casa*. Here the servants, Rosita and the men of the troop were waiting to see the outcome, and as Westdell rode the big coyote home unhurt they gave him a great round of "*Vivas!*"

"I shall ride him again later; let him have the sun and rest in the stable yard," Westdell said laughingly.

"Yes, the sun will do him good; he has been stalled for a week now," Rosita said. "The cooks have made a meal for the men of my husband's troop," she added; "it is ready in the cook shed."

"First, I must see if the prisoner is safe, and relieve the man with her," Westdell said; "we must keep good watch of her, for it is the order of El Matador."

He went through the door and along the passage. He found the guard before the door, on a stool. He ordered him to give him the key to the room and then to go and eat. The fellow departed gladly enough. Westdell sat down. The lattice was shoved back and he could see into the room. The girl was sitting, pensive, gazing out of the barred window. In one corner was a shut door. This, Westdell thought, must lead to some adjoining closet.

Westdell made a turn up and down the corridor. He saw and heard no one. He came back. The girl had not changed her position.

"Señorita," he said.

At once she started. She looked at him as his face appeared at the lattice space, and he saw loathing and scorn come into her eye as she said:

"You? Again?"

"Yes, again, though it seems to you unfortunate that it is so."

"A Texan, an American, allied with these killers! I had rather have one of them guard me than such a renegade."

"Such as I am, you will have to take me, señorita. But listen!"

His tones had the low, thrilling whisper of secrecy. She held his glance unwaveringly.

"There may be a reason for my actions. I must come in."

"Stay outside, or I will scream and call any one who may hear. I feel safer with you outside this room."

But he unlocked the door, and stepped inside, locking it behind him.

She stared at him coldly:

"Why all this mystery and attempt at drama?"

"Listen, señorita. I may be offering my life with this, but I make the offer. If we are overheard, it will mean a fight for me against a gang of bandits who will show no mercy."

"What do you propose?"

"In the stable yard there are under saddle the two finest horses here. I can let you out and we can steal along this corridor to a door I see in the rear. When riding just a few moments ago, I noted that stairs go down to the stable yard from the rear of the *casa*, just where that door must open. Trust me, and in two minutes we can be riding toward freedom. Once in the open, I think I can get you safely to some place where there is organized authority that will protect us and bring justice down on these robbers who have control of this section of the country."

In speaking thus his voice had taken on a vibrant ring and risen, without his being aware of it, in volume. She looked at him squarely and with steady desire to probe to the depths of his intention.

"But why are you here in the band of this butcher? Why have you been so harsh? You are one of them. How can I believe and trust you?"

"I had to be harsh, to deceive them. I am here because I saw you going into a region where you were in danger.

You refused to turn back when warned. I became one of them so that I could help you."

"If I only could believe you!"

Her hands were clasped under her chin. She was as tall as he. Her eyes met his own levelly.

"Why do you not believe me?" he asked.

"I only know you as a killer. You slew a man above the border. You escaped by taking my horse."

"You did not oppose me. If you had, I never should have taken him, Miss Morgan," and now Westdell slipped back into English in his excitement.

"Here I have some sort of protection. El Matador will hold me for ransom. It will be paid. And I shall be released." This with that proud outthrusting of the dimpled chin and squaring of the shoulders that he had come to look for and to know so well. "With you, what shall I gain?"

"But you do not know this El Matador. He loves gold, yes, and needs it. But you are too beautiful to remain in his power. Do you understand what I mean?"

His manner had become pleading. His hands were stretched toward her. She had come closer, and their backs were to that corner where the door was that Westdell had taken for the door of a closet.

"I am here where his wife is. I feel safer here." Her coldness returned as his fervor mounted.

"But you do not understand. You were wrong even to venture off the beaten tracks in these troubled times. The federal government is doing what it can, but it will take time for it to clean up these remote sections. This place is the headquarters of a confederation of bandit chiefs, and you are as much in danger here as if you stood in a den of lions."

The very vehemence of his appeal shook her. She began to pace the floor slowly, glancing at him from time to time.

"And I may be missed at any moment and called away," he continued. "Trust me, and go with me. In two minutes I can have you on a fast horse and can ride with you. You will be safe or I dead inside of twenty-four hours. I know the people and the land. As a young man I worked south of the border. I can care for you and I will."

She hesitated still. He broke out again eagerly:

"What motive can I have, except to do you good?"

"None," she admitted. "Yes, I will trust you, Westdell. Come, let us go quickly, before any one comes."

She gave him her hand and they walked toward the door. His hand was at the key to turn it. He heard her gasp. She was looking back, toward that other door.

His glance traveled with hers.

The door was open; it had swung back silently.

In the doorway was framed the swarthy face of Escobar, wreathed in a grin of somber triumph. In his hand was a Luger gun. He spoke sneeringly:

"So this is the keeper our chief chose to watch his new turtledove? Señor Tejano, you are my prisoner. Raise your hands!"

He stepped into the room and advanced toward them.

In his left hand was a knife of broad, keen blade.

In Westdell's right hand was only the key to the outer door.

Escobar shoved the girl aside roughly and advanced close to Westdell. His lips were bared in a wolf-snarl of rage:

"The chief put you over me, over Escobar, who has ridden at his side and fought and bled with him for years! You, a hated Tejano, spawn of the North! Look you, Tejano, the chief will thank me for killing you. He trusted you, and you have turned traitor.

That door opens into a secret passage by which it is possible to spy on prisoners kept there. I saw you dodge away when we were called to eat. I suspected your intention of seeing the prisoner alone, and when the real guard came down and said you had taken his place, I went quietly up the secret stairs and listened. I have heard it all. But I shall not kill you. I shall bind you and save you for the fury of El Matador. Go, lie on the cot, face down!" and the Luger was jammed into Westdell's ribs with sickening force. The big knife was held against his throat. Westdell retreated, step by step, the eyes of Escobar blazing close to his own. The swarthy man timed each step with that of the Tejano. The girl for the moment was forgotten in the excitement of capturing the man.

CHAPTER X.

"EL LOBO BLANCO!"

THEN Westdell yielded. He saw death in those glaring eyes.

"Turn around and fall onto the cot, face down," again came the order, and Westdell knew he must be right before the truckle-bed. He heard the knife fall and knew that Escobar had dropped it to have a hand free to tie the knots. He did not look down. His eyes were on those of Escobar.

The Luger thrust deep. The pain of the savage pressure was almost unendurable. Westdell smiled:

"Escobar, you are a fool," he said.

The man blinked.

"Yes, a fool. You could call the men, but then the exploit would not reflect credit upon you. So you wish to do it all. I tell you, you are a fool."

This confident bearing puzzled the swarthy bandit. He knew how to fight, was brave in his own way. But beyond a certain low cunning his brains worked poorly. He tried to estimate what Westdell meant. Thus a pause was brought about, in which they faced each other, eye testing eye for the mastery.

"Besides, what will you tie me with?" mockingly asked Westdell.

"Enough, lie down!" ordered the bandit, in a tone that precluded debate.

Westdell began to turn. The Luger was raised to permit this. Westdell's eyes lowered, as if in defeat. Escobar laughed.

Halfway around in his pivot, Westdell's hands swept down together. The Luger was out of line. Westdell's right hand got Escobar's wrist and twisted it aside; his left was clasped for an instant over his own gun. Then he threw Escobar back and as Escobar staggered, Westdell threw up his gun and pulled.

The gun did not go off.

At the same instant the girl threw a stool at Escobar, and it struck him on the chest, confusing him. Westdell's gun came leaping out again as Escobar pulled on his uselessly. Escobar threw down his gun and put up his hands.

"Cut strips from those old blankets and tie him," Westdell ordered. Escobar opened his lips to call out, but Westdell shoved his gun's muzzle into his mouth, ordering him to keep it open and be silent, or die.

The girl, with steady hand, cut strips from the blankets. In two minutes Escobar was safely tied up. He was put on the floor and the bed piled on top of him. A gag of wadded rags was in his mouth.

Westdell picked up the gun. Between trigger and trigger-guard he had jammed the door key when he had grappled with Escobar, rendering it impossible for the bandit to use the gun. Plucking out the key, Westdell got Escobar's belt, which he had taken from him. He draped this over his own hip and put the gun in its holster. Then he spoke to the girl again:

"Come, there is yet time!"

They started out of the room quietly. In the corridor they paused, listening.

Down below all was silent. Westdell judged the hour to be about that of the siesta's beginning. No one was talking below.

He urged Berenice to hasten toward the rear door of the corridor. It was bolted, but on the inside. He opened it and peered out.

Down below, on the wide block of stone at the bottom, two Indians sprawled, enjoying a nap. He pointed to them and made a sign for silence. He went first, his hand on his six-gun. She came after, with rare courage and steadiness.

The stairway was of wood. It creaked. Yet the Indians did not stir. Westdell heard the tail of a horse switch and felt sure that his calculations were correct. Around that corner of the *casa* was the stable shed and tied to it was the black of Rosita. The big coyote stud of El Matador was in the stable yard. Once they emerged in the open, rushed up to those peerless steeds and mounted, they were safe, for nothing about Del Sol could overtake them, Westdell felt sure.

They reached the bottom of the stair.

The Indians grunted a bit as they stepped over them, that was all. The girl was silent and steady. She glanced at him and smiled. She had gone from loathing and suspicion of him to full confidence and this made him the more eager to get her away and not to fail her.

They came to the corner of the main *casa*. Now they could see the stable yard, the long, low shed.

The black horse was there, fighting the flies. At the caprice of Rosita he had been under saddle for hours now, merely that she might make a show of her importance by keeping him there. A little way down the shed front was the great silken-coated coyote of El Matador. He turned his head and saw them, and at once he whickered softly.

No one was in sight.

From the stable resounded snores, showing where men of the troop were sleeping soundly.

The sun glared down with immense force.

"Come; a dash and we are away! We have no food, but we can get that later. Lucky you have your riding clothes," Westdell whispered.

They went toward the horses. As they did so, a woman's scream rang out:

"Help, some one has tied up Escobar! The prisoner is escaping!"

It was the voice of Rosita. Impelled by jealousy, she had gone again to look at the woman she feared had attracted the attention of El Matador. She had found the door open, Escobar bound. Now she was giving the alarm.

"Quick!" Westdell called to Berenice.

He pushed her toward the big black horse. She swung to the saddle as he jerked the tie-knot free and threw her the reins. She had mounted by grasping the horn and she caught the reins expertly. He dashed for the coyote. A great uproar began in the house. No one had yet appeared from the stables to see what was going on.

They wheeled their horses toward the open gateway, toward freedom. As they did so, there was a chorus of wild yells outside, and then cries of rage and voices begging for mercy. It all made up a medley of confusing sounds that neither could estimate correctly.

A man appeared in the gateway and threw down a gun menacingly, calling upon the fugitives to surrender.

Westdell's gun leaped forward, flamed. The man fired, but his bullet went wild and he began to slump down, falling on his face, just as Berenice sent her horse leaping over his body. Westdell was after her instantly, and at once the two great horses began to scud past the *casa*. Wild yells resounded behind them, and lead whined. Westdell watched his own horse for any wincing that might prove that he was hit. He called a warning to the girl to be ready

to throw herself free, if her horse sank down from a wound. He admired her skill as a horsewoman. Her seat was firm and her chin was high, Her hand was light on the rein, and the grand black under her seemed rippling with reserve power as they rounded onto the trail by which they had arrived at Del Sol—that narrow trail along the bench overlooking the rich valley. Here they had the hill's shoulder at their right, the drop of the valley at their left, and the shelf was not wide. Westdell whirled in the saddle and saw that pursuit was under way.

"If I knew this country," he called, "I might do better. As it is, we have little to do but to ride back over the trail that we both know."

She nodded her uncovered head. They had had no time to find her hat in that hurried rush to the horses and the escape. Westdell's own hat he had retained through all his activities at Del Sol.

The horses seemed to flow over the trail, so smooth was their gait, and a great yearning, even in the midst of the danger, came to Westdell to own that coyote whose gait was like silk. The two horses were taking it all as a mere race—a play spell after being stabled so long that they were yearning for the open air, the sun, the breeze, the sky, and the trail flying beneath their hammering feet.

The pursuers fell behind. The bench trail narrowed and wound. In the early morning light Westdell had not noticed the trail much coming in; he had other things on his mind—the managing of the savage men under him so strangely, the rôle he was to play at Del Sol, the part that Escobar was playing, and the depth of the latter's double duplicity. So he had missed many details of the trail that opened up before him as he rode on.

Now he saw that at that place the trail had sharp bends in it which hid the route ahead for many hundred yards at a time.

Around one of these bends they swept. The black and coyote were beginning to warm up to their work. Westdell felt that as they were distancing pursuit, it would be well not to ride the horses out too much in that first rush for freedom. He restrained the coyote and called on her to hold down the black. The trail ahead bent again and there was a stretch that they could not see till they had turned that corner.

They swept around it side by side. The bend was narrower still out there. Another bend showed ahead. Westdell again called on the girl to slow up. She turned in the saddle and he could see the lift of her firm chin and the easy grip she had on her reins. She was resolute, and her fighting spirit was high. Her eye was level and undaunted.

They rounded that other bend.

Westdell drew his horse to a stop and so did Berenice.

Coming toward them sped a dozen men, riding easily, plainly surprised to see them appear thus suddenly in their path.

Westdell saw hands swing over to the left, and knew they were tugging at rifles in saddle-sheaths. He had no long gun. If it had been a question of his own peril, he would have chanced a quick turn and retreat, or a mad charge, in the effort to ride through them, trusting to the courage and power of the great coyote stud to smash their wiry ponies down and aside. But he had the girl to think of. All this went through his mind like a flash as the dust made by the horses in stopping eddied and ballooned ahead of them.

She was pointing to the clifflike descent to the flat land below, the vale of Del Sol. For the moment they were hidden behind that dust screen. Before he could intervene and prevent her from taking the risk, she whirled her black and sent him down a goat path along the

descent, and he scudded over the rim after her. The two horses slid, carrying loose stuff and rocks with them. The incoming party spurred to the very edge of the drop and began to shoot hastily. The fugitives reached the bottom in a smother of rolling stones, sand, and dust, but the gallant horses were uninjured as they struck the flatlands and began to lope along the foot of the descent, close in. Here the wall seemed to bulge over them for a way, and they had protection from fire.

Despite the fact that they could not be reached, the rifle-fire did not slacken. It was as if the attackers were determined to hold them in for a time. Then Westdell saw men at the head of the same perilous path by which he and Berenice had descended. They were trying to force their wiry mounts to take the descent, but the ponies were balking, walling back their eyes and squatting in terror at the prospect. Just as it seemed that they would start some of the ponies down, there came a second burst of rifle-fire and then yells and the roar of a charging cavalcade.

"I guess our pursuers from Del Sol have struck that other crowd, but why should they fight?" Westdell asked.

They had paused under the overhang of the clifflike wall of earth below the bench trail. Suddenly a horse and rider came hurtling down from above, striking to their left, both dead.

"That's no sham fight," Westdell said, pointing to the victims of it. The shots rang out still and loud cries of pain were to be heard.

Then all was quiet up there. They listened intently. Groans, the neighing of wounded horses, they heard. Then a voice began to give commands sharply and they heard horsemen coming from the direction of Agua Dulce; there were loud cries of recognition, then excited phrases, giving a hurried account of what had happened as if to some one in authority.

"Can it be that El Matador arrived home unexpectedly?" Westdell said.

The girl's face was set firmly. Her hand as she held the bridle reins high was light. Her eyes were not showing fear. She pointed to the flatlands:

"Our chance lies there. A quick dash and we shall be out of range."

"Yes, there is a chance, but hark!"

They could hear hoof-beats, those of a troop. And they did not sound as if they were made by horses on the shelf above. They sounded as if on a level with their position.

"They are signaling to some one in the valley; those above have told pursuers to look for us down here," Westdell told her, his face showing anxiety, in spite of his attempt to keep it concealed.

Even as he spoke a dozen men came around the bulge in the cliff wall from below, rifles out and ready. And from above, too, others came. The Americans were the center upon which two parties of pursuers were converging and above was a third party, able to deliver a plunging fire.

"We must yield," Westdell warned Berenice. "They are not El Matador's men."

The two parties met, surrounded Westdell and the girl. Hot glances of desire were cast upon the two noble horses.

"We are ordered by our chief, above, to take you back to Del Sol," a young fellow who seemed to be in authority said decisevely. "The men who charged our company have been either killed or captured."

"As we were just out for a morning gallop to exercise our horses, there is no reason why we should not go back," Westdell replied. "As for those who charged your friends above, we are not responsible for them."

The young fellow flashed a keen glance at him and smiled.

"Come, then, there is a much better

way up to the bench trail than the goat-track you took coming down. Pedro, signal them above that we are to come up where the white boulder marks the easy path downward."

A man from the ranks stepped back and began to bellow to those above in a tremendous bass voice. The young fellow started the men, himself riding close to Westdell and Berenice. In a few moments they came to a huge white stone against the foot of the clifflike wall and here, indeed, was a path up to the bench trail. They climbed it, hearing the other company coming along to meet them. As they came to the top of the trail, and just as the two groups began to form into a single company of at least forty men—wild, irregular troops, Westdell judged in a flash—a tall, slender man rode up from the rear. His right hand was in a bandage. His glance, like that of a raptorial bird, ran over the group. It rested sharply on Berenice and Westdell. Then he began to laugh:

"We meet again, Señor Tejano? You shot too soon for me in the *fonda* in Agua Dulce. And the Señorita Morgan? Good! We shall take Del Sol now and when El Matador comes home he will find a ravished nest—and a grave. Tejano, you shall feel the weight of vengeance."

At once the men began to shout: "*Viva* El Lobo Blanco!"

"He is worse than El Matador," Westdell whispered to Berenice.

"To Del Sol," El Lobo ordered, and they formed ranks in rough order and began to move toward the great hacienda.

CHAPTER XI.

DEL SOL AGAIN.

THE few prisoners taken in the fight that had occurred when the men pursuing Westdell and the girl had crashed into the bandit's troop on the bench trail were placed in the middle of the captors, along with Westdell and Berenice. All were disarmed, several wounded. Westdell's gun had been taken as soon as El Lobo had seen that his subordinate had not disarmed the Tejano.

El Lobo rode close to Westdell. He reached over and patted the big coyote stud:

"A horse like that is worth having. He shall be mine."

He then eyed the big black on which Berenice rode and said that he would take that, too. The men under him who had cast such envious eyes at the two steeds showed their disappointment, but as the chief had made the choice, they had to remain quiet.

El Lobo addressed as Carvajal the lieutenant who had led the party that had captured Westdell and Berenice. He, too, had eyes for the American girl at times when the bandit chieftain was not looking.

All through the ranks of this new bandit crowd Westdell sensed a spirit different from that amongst the men of El Matador. These bandits were sullen, as was their chief. Each had a rifle and at least one big Luger; several had a pair of Lugers. Their horses were gaunt, shaggy. Their clothing was nondescript, their hats battered. Some were barefoot. Only their chief was dressed well. He bestrode a tough hill pony, wall-eyed and ewe-necked, but evidently made for endurance, if not for extreme speed.

From the talk of the prisoners, Westdell and Berenice gathered that they were mystified over the morning's events. All they knew of the affair was that Escobar had appeared, crying that the prisoner was escaping, and they had started at once in pursuit. Escobar had been amongst the foremost in charging the band of El Lobo and had been killed.

"How could the girl prisoner escape, when I was with her?" Westdell asked of them. "I rode with her for exercise,

as El Matador instructed me. Escobar was jealous of me and tried to make more of it than the facts, that he might be able to make a report to the chief favorable to himself.

They were silent then, for none of them were above peon rank and they had small reasoning force, as against the subtle powers of the Texan. Noticing that they were talking, El Lobo ordered them to cease conferring amongst themselves. He looked the captive troopers over one by one and then spoke:

"You have one choice—join our band or face a firing squad."

They promised, with ready compliance, to join his band. One of them confessed to El Lobo that only a few men were left at Del Sol. The Indians, the servants, would not fight.

As they approached the hacienda, people were seen before the *casa,* watching them come. El Lobo made no display of force, feeling secure in the element of surprise. Rosita was there, puzzled and alarmed at last. El Lobo saluted her with a mock show of respect:

"I am sorry to put you to trouble, señora, but I require the use of this so beautiful place for my men."

"Who are you? El Matador will not let this pass."

"But unfortunately, El Matador is not here. I, señora, am El Lobo Blanco, your humble servant," with a further show of respect.

Rosita's face blanched. She glanced at the prisoners and then she realized the truth. She darted toward the main door, but a lithe man swung to the ground at a signal from El Lobo and caught her by her wrists. She screamed, not with fear now but with rage.

"Those gems, Pedro!" El Lobo ordered.

The men laughed as Pedro calmly proceeded to strip off her jewels. Rosita was thrust in the midst of the others, who were dismounted at once.

"There is a room in Del Sol used for confining prisoners?" El Lobo said to one of the men captured on the bench trail.

"I can show you the place, señor."

"Carvajal, see that they are shut up there. Let the men of El Matador take the oath to serve with us, or face the firing squad."

In a few more minutes Westdell, Berenice, and Rosita were in the prison room, the black and coyote horses had been taken to the stables and ordered placed in stalls under special guards, answerable to El Lobo.

Into the prison room the three were thrust without ceremony. Rosita was downcast, but Berenice was hopeful and spoke soothingly to her:

"Rosita, El Lobo will not harm you."

"But my husband! I know this has come upon me for my pride. I remember how I scorned my father and rejoiced to see you fallen."

"Such things pass. Sit here, Rosita. See, I do not hold a grudge against you," and Berenice put her arm about the waist of the weeping woman and drew her onto the bed. A guard appeared at the door and rattled the lattice. He entered and announced that he had come to search Westdell for arms. Westdell, who was on a low stool, shrugged, and raised his hands to let the fellow go through his clothing. The guard did this thoroughly and found nothing. Then Westdell put his hands back into his pockets again and laughed at him: "El Lobo must think that guns or knives grow of themselves. They took my weapons when I was first captured."

The man went out, locking the door on the outside. A guard was in the corridor. He looked in at the lattice every little while. The two girls talked, Berenice seeking to lift the burden of trouble from the shoulders of the woman who only recently had acted the part of an ingrate toward her.

Every hour that he saw her raised

this strong, fearless, quiet American girl higher in the estimation of Kylie Westdell. She acquitted herself with credit in every part she was called upon to play.

Rosita presently yielded to the quieting influence of Berenice and relaxed upon the bed. Westdell signed to Berenice that he wished to speak to her. She came to the corner where he sat and he whisperingly formed for her this phrase: "I still have the key to the door."

Her eyes flashed brilliantly with hope.

"I used it to unlock the door after we had bound Escobar. When he searched me, I put up my hands. But I had the key in one of them and when I put my hands down, after he had searched me, I put the key in my pocket again. He never saw it. If we can get out, will you trust me again?"

She nodded assent. Just then the guard came to the lattice and once more ordered them to cease whispering as he had instructions not to permit them to do that, for fear some plan for escape might be made up.

They separated, she to go to Rosita again and Westdell to sit in the corner on the low stool. They were silent. Suddenly there was the sound of voices in the corridor. Westdell caught the name "El Lobo." When Rosita was not looking he made a signal to Berenice and held up the key. He tossed it to her and she slipped it in her dress in front. Then the door swung back and El Lobo entered. His face was flushed; he was smiling.

"You fare well here, señora," he said sarcastically. "I have dined well and drunk well. I think I shall like it in Del Sol."

Rosita sat up and looked at the man scornfully.

"Not when El Matador returns," she corrected.

"I have come to take this Tejano to a safer place. I shall have a time of pleasure with him soon."

He snapped his fingers and two men came in, each with a gun ready. They took hold of Westdell and led him from the room and down the corridor. He was forced along, a gun on either hand pressed against his ribs, led to a rear room, a sort of storeroom, behind the main *casa,* and there forced down a rude stair to an underground place, stone-walled, damp. He was put with his back against a huge beam that served to support the floor of the storeroom above, his wrists tied behind his back and the cord lashed to the beam. The two men went away and left him, letting down the heavy door. He heard a bolt slide in it, securing it. Then he was in darkness.

He could hear the dripping of water somewhere. Something scurried across his feet, squeaking—a rat.

Westdell could hear no sound. He was buried for the time being. He had no doubt but that he was to be led out soon to face whatever vengeance El Lobo had in store for him. The man's reputation for ferocity had been known to Westdell before he had reached Agua Dulce and it was condensed into a saying of the peons: "What El Matador leaves, El Lobo Blanco eats up!"

This ruthless leader of bandits was now in full possession of Del Sol, which in itself was a fortress. Westdell was without arms, in a prison underground. Berenice was in the power of a bandit far worse than El Matador, and he could not help her.

Now, for the first time, the heart of Westdell failed him. It seemed to him that the end of hope had really been reached.

Again the huge rat crossed his feet, squeaking. Then it sprang up and he felt it at his trousers near the knee. It climbed on the folds of his clothing, biting. Westdell shivered. He feared it might be a rat infected with hydro-

phobia from being bitten by a mad skunk. His hands were behind him. He threw himself around frantically and the rat was shaken free and fell, squeaking its rage. Westdell felt another climbing his leg, and he managed to kick it with the other foot. Then he heard other rats, fighting each other, it seemed, and several of them attacked his clothing. He tried to shake them loose. One had reached his breast and he heard its teeth chatter.

A dim light shone. A low voice spoke, as the rats scurried from the light:

"Señor, do not be alarmed; I am come to assist you."

Westdell stared.

An old man was advancing toward him, a man whose face was seamed with the passing of the years and with suffering. In one hand he had a candle, in the other a naked knife with a long, straight blade.

"I, too, have reason to hate El Matador, señor," he whispered; "and I shall free you. There are secret passages in this Del Sol that only the older ones know. I was here when it was built by the Spanish grandee who sold it to Señor Morgan. There is a secret passage leading to this old room, which was once the treasure-room of the place. Come, follow me!"

He cut the bonds, and Westdell felt himself free. He followed the old man without question and was led to a door that seemed to be a panel in the rough sheathing of the place.

The door was shut behind them by a weight on a rusted pulley and they proceeded silently through a low, narrow passage. Presently they came to another door. In it was a chink.

Westdell, at the old man's suggestion, glanced through the chink. The door opened out onto the space behind the *casa*.

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

COLORADO'S GOLDEN ROAD

IT is hard for the average person to realize just how "golden" various parts of the West are. Nuggets have been known to tumble out of hillsides at the stroke of a pick, though this is not an everyday occurrence. And now there has come from Fort Morgan, Colorado, news of a highway that is mottled with the precious metal.

This stretch of road, forming a link in the system of southern Colorado, is five miles long. It rejoices in the name of "The Golden Highway," for it ranks among the most unique and costly trails in the world. Every mile of the concrete roadbed, according to experts, contains fully three thousand dollars in virgin gold, which has found a humble resting place under the wheels of automobiles. The reason for this seeming waste of the world's most popular commodity is the fact that the crushed rock used in the cement mixture was shipped from the ore dumps of the rich Cripple Creek gold field, after all that was practical of its valuable contents had been extracted.

Reports indicate that the highway material assays one dollar and a half to the ton. So, on the basis of this computation, the glittering road averages about three thousand dollars a mile.

Bite!

By Roland Krebs

Author of "Stars and Crosses," etc.

YOU'D have thought on the day that "Dude" McArdle joined our outfit that an "Uncle Tom's Cabin" company or a magician specializing in trunk mysteries was arriving at the R Bar R. So help me hassenpfeffer, this puncher brought four trunks with him, same being filled almost entirely with clothes!

Dude McArdle was a living picture of what the well-dressed cow chaperon was wearing in Montana. I don't know as I blame him any for being so choosey about his clothes. He was a very handsome sort of a guy, and why shouldn't a fellow set hisself off nice with swell rags? He kept himself very neat, too, which is more than I can say for "Biffalo Bull", "Red" Johns, "Hungry" Hosford, "Shorty" Nolan, and some of the others of our mob.

He was a pleasant sort of a fellow, also, having a friendly smile for everybody and an agreeable disposition. He didn't mind being called Dude. In fact, that's the way he introduced hisself, explaining afterward that he had got so used to the nickname that somebody had wished onto him years ago that he'd just about forgot his first name was Theron, which he'd found agreeable to forget.

"Good gosh, Al," remarked Red Johns to me the first evening that the Dude spent with us, "I just been watching this new guy in the bunk house, and it looks like if he's going to be kept so busy prettyin' hisself up all the time that he won't have no time to look after the herd at all.

"He's got some sort of smelly stuff that he oils his hair with, and he puts cold cream on his pan after he shaves and, believe it or not, he's actually got

a finger nail file and a funny little pointed stick that he said was to be used on 'troublesome cuticle,' whatever that is. Yes, sir, this 'Thereupon' McArdle looks to me like a big sissy."

Just as Red Johns made this last crack, the bunk-house door opened and the Dude, stepping out, overheard it. Very promptly about it, McArdle walked up to Red, grabbed him by the shirt front, twisted it in a strong, brown fist, and said:

"Listen, you, you may not like the way I dress and all like that, but don't get the idea I'm a sissy."

Whereupon, Theron swung with his free arm and slapped Red's face so hard that the cheek got as red as Mr. Johns' hair, which is the color of the flags quarry workers wave when they touch off blasting powder.

Of course, this called for a fisticuff or two. Red hastened to vindicate hisself. He pushed a powerful right toward the Dude's chin. McArdle let his head sag to the left, the blow went past his right ear and his right fist crashed into Mr. Johns' jaw with such a thump that Red flew over backwards and lay there—as cold as a chunk of the North Pole.

Then, calmly lighting a cigarette—with a pocket lighter, by Godfrey!—Dude McArdle picked Red up in his arms like he was an infant, carried him over to a watering trough, and dropped him in to bring him to. This done, he walked back to where a bunch of us surprised cow-punchers were standing with our tonsils exposed to the sun and wind.

"Do any of the rest of you guys think I'm a sissy?" the Dude asked, very quietly, between puffs.

Nobody answered.

"Do you, for instance?" Mr. McArdle repeated, digging a finger into little Shorty Nolan, the nearest to him.

Shorty looked from the Dude to the trough where Red was beginning to come to life. Shorty grinned. He's not exactly in love with Red Johns, on account Red frames up so many practical jokes on him.

"Heck no!" Shorty said. "I think you're a swell fellow myself. I don't think you're a sissy."

"For once in your life you're right!" Red busted out, crawling out of the water trough. He shook Dude McArdle's hand and smiled. "And for once in my life I was wrong."

We got to like the Dude more and more around the R Bar R. It was Biffalo Bull who expressed the sentiments of the outfit when he said McArdle was as decent a cuss as ever rode a pony. When he was hustling, there wasn't a better puncher in the West. He got just as grimy and dirty as any of us, but he was always the first to clean up, and in his leisure time he seemed to get a lot of satisfaction out of being well-dressed, shaved, and clean. I don't mean, though, that he dressed like a movie cowboy on the Long Island lots. His clothes were simply good quality, made to fit, and plentiful.

For some time I noticed that Hungry Hosford, owner of the biggest appetite west of the Rocky Mountains—and east, too, for that matter—was very much interested in the Dude, and I didn't quite figure it out until one afternoon when a certain odor came from the cook shack. It was the delightful scent of baking rhubarb pie.

It dawned on me in a flash that Hungry's interest was tied up with the hope that maybe the new guy didn't care for rhubarb pie, same being something that Hungry cares a heap for. I believe that that bird would enjoy Eskimo dog steaks or whalemeat, but of all the things to eat he enjoys, rhubarb pie leads the list.

Our chuck wrangler, Wolfgang G. Schaeperkoetter, makes very, very wonderful candied rhubarb pie, as I guess I've probably told you more often than

enough. Whenever he makes it, he bakes enough so each man gets a quarter pie. That's plenty for anybody but a pig like Hungry. Just the same, the "Wolf" refuses to give him any more, our cook being strong for not playing favorites. Hungry has tried for months and months to buy somebody else's slice, trade for it, or shoot craps for it, but nobody gives him a tumble.

Sure enough! Hungry was tackling the new man.

"Do you like rhubarb pie, Dude?" I heard him ask.

McArdle looked up from the belt into which he was putting a design made of brass studs.

"Sure," he said. "I like any kind of pie. Why? Have you got some you want to get rid of?"

Hungry's face fell. "No," he said. "I ain't got any, I'm sorry to say."

"Why were you askin'?" the Dude went on, working on his left hand with a finger nail file.

Hungry Hosford put on a sort of confidential air.

"Well, I've got a regular weakness for rhubarb pie," he said. "I don't know what there is about it, but it's got me. I just feel miserable if I don't get my fill of rhubarb pie. My nerves go all to blazes."

"Gee, that's too bad," the Dude remarked.

Hungry got encouraged. He hammered away some more, making up scientific dope as he went along.

"Yeah," he said, "rhubarb pie seems to quiet me. Rhubarb, I guess you know, is got lots more and bigger calories than the average vegetable. Its calories is twice as big as the usual run, too. Of course, everybody knows how good calories are for the nerves."

Dude McArdle sniffed the air, tilting his nose in the direction of the cook shack.

"You ought to get your nerves all smoothed out," he observed. "Seems to me like the cook's fixing rhubarb pie right now."

"He is," Hungry agreed hopefully.

"Then you ought to get your fill."

"That's the heck of it," Mr. Hosford complained. "That darned cook is so stingy with his pie! He won't give me more'n a quarter."

He waited anxiously for the Dude to do the generous thing and say he could have his piece.

Dude McArdle, though, wasn't any dummy. If he thought there was anything wrong with Hungry's nerves, which I doubt, I know that he saw right away that Hungry Hosford had a lot of healthy nerve—more'n one human's entitled to pack around.

Despairing finally of getting any offers, Hungry propositioned the Dude outright.

"What'll you take for your piece?"

"Nothing; I like pie," McArdle said, getting out a pocket comb and smoothing his hair.

"I'll shake the dice for it—your pie against two dollars."

"Nope."

"Your pie against a five-spot."

"Nothing stirring."

"I'll trade you my skinning knife for it. It's a swell knife—and the huntin' season'll be along directly."

"I got a knife. Shut up about the pie! A quarter of a pie's enough for anybody."

That's the way that Hosford bird had done with every one of us until he'd made such a pest of himself that we'd threatened him in a body with violence if he didn't shut up about rhubarb pie.

He gave up working on McArdle and gloomily watched the Dude muss his hair up and comb it all over again.

"Say," he inquired finally, "I been noticing that while you got all kinds of salves and tonics and truck like that for keeping yourself tidied up, you don't seem to have any tooth brush or

tooth paste. How come? Don't you clean your teeth?"

"Sure."

"How?"

"I take 'em out and scrub 'em."

"Take 'em out? How?"

Both Hungry's and my eyes popped out when the Dude reached into his mouth and extracted a whole set of false teeth. Then he put them back.

"It's all phony china," he grinned.

"How does a young fellow like you come to have false teeth?" the astonished Hungry demanded. "I thought only old stiffs had fake teeth."

"Well, you know, in recent years doctors have took to pulling teeth a lot to cure sick people," the Dude explained. "They got an idea that lots of ails can be traced to bad teeth. Sometimes, I suppose, they're right. Well, I was took down with stomach trouble two years ago and I and the croaker attendin' to me didn't suspect that it was from bad water I was drinkin'. This guy began extracting my teeth, looking for the troublesome one, and first thing you know he had them all out."

"Can you chew with them as good as with personal teeth?"

"Oh, I won't say 'as good,' but I manage to get my meals all right. False teeth sure are a boon. I wouldn't be able to eat nothing but liquid grub without them—soup, and mush, and such tripe."

"Believe me, no doctor's ever going to yank out my teeth," Hungry Hosford said.

"Your stomach would probably breathe a prayer of thanks if some doctor did," Red Johns put in.

The conversation was busted up by the Wolf yelping that the grub was ready. Hungry, like usual, was first at the table—which meant also he'd be last at the table.

"Say, by the way, Dude," 'Slim' Evers said, "there's a dance at Elks Hall in town to-morrow night. I'll be glad to get you an invite if you want to go."

"Thanks," McArdle answered, "but I had the good luck to get invited a week ago, and I'm sure goin'. I'd like to get acquainted with all the girls hereabouts."

"I'm going, too," Hungry announced, tackling his rhubarb pie. "Think I'll get an early start and get barbered and shaved in town and eat supper there. Still, I don't know—what you going to have to eat to-morrow night, Wolf?"

"Among other things, rhubarb pie," the cook chuckled. "The rhubarb in town yesterday was exceptional good and I made twice as much pie."

"Well, what about giving me my to-morrow's piece to-night?" Hungry suggested.

"Try and get it—but don't hold your breath while you're waitin'. You'll suffocate."

The Dude began making preparations for the dance early the next afternoon. He shined up a pair of new, black shoes.

"I like black shoes rather than tan in the evenin'," he told me. "They're a heap dressier."

He pressed himself a suit, too, and laid out all his clean clothes. Then, having nothing to do, Dude McArdle settled himself in his bunk and took a nap.

After he had been sleeping for half an hour, I happened to go into the bunk house for a pack of cigarettes and there stumbled across something I wasn't supposed to see."

It was Hungry in the act of swiping the Dude's false teeth, which the new puncher had removed while he slept, as do most folks whose molars are on demountable rims.

"You ain't going to turn me up, are you, Al?" Mr. Hosford asked me.

"All depends on what you're doing this—uh—stealing for," I told him.

"I'm aiming to get his rhubarb pie to-night," Hungry told me in pleading tones. "You heard what he said—he can't eat nothing but liquid foods without this phony china. Al, I tell you my system needs rhubarb pie. There's more calories——"

"Applesauce!" I cut him off. "I won't turn you up. I want to see the fun."

Well, there was some fun and a awful lot of fuss when Dude McArdle woke up and found his teeth were gone.

Gee, he was a sight, too! The usually handsome puncher had his face sort of caved-in around the jaw, and he talked funny.

The rest of the boys, thinking they were lost or mislaid, got busy helping him hunt. Hungry Hosford, the crook, was busiest of the pack, suggesting maybe they rolled under the bunk, possibly they fell off the window sill, didn't he maybe have them in his pocket? The Dude didn't seem to suspect Hungry at all—at least, not at first.

When the Wolf yelled that chow was ready, the hunt had to be called off temporarily.

I did sort of feel sorry for the Dude when he found what was set before him—a nice juicy steak, shoestring potatoes, green peas, sliced tomatoes, cornbread, and a wedge of rhubarb pie.

The cook was all sympathy when he heard of the Dude's teeth straying off the range, and bustled around getting him some hot broth to eat.

Hungry, too, was sympathetic. In fact, he was so sympathetic that it wasn't long before Dude McArdle was giving him the eye, sort of suspiciously, I thought.

"It's a cryin' shame you can't eat that steak, Dude," Hungry said. "And them nice potatoes and peas. Boy, you sure got my sympathy."

"I feel sorry for myself," the Dude admitted. He studied and looked at Mr. Hosford. "Want my steak, Hungry?"

"Why, sure, if you can't eat it nohow."

"And the potatoes?"

"Be much obliged for them."

"And the tomatoes and cornbread—take them. I can't use them."

Hungry's eyes began to glisten. His scheme was working, it seemed. Having given away all the rest of his grub, it merely remained for Dude McArdle to dispose of his rhubarb pie.

Hungry waited.

And he waited.

And waited.

Finally he couldn't stand the suspense no longer.

"What are you aimin' to do with your pie, Dude?" he asked, just the least little bit timidlike.

"Oh, I think I'll save that; I like pie."

"Rhubarb pie spoils easy."

"Well, I hadn't thought of that."

"Tell you what I'll do." Hungry was generous. "You'll have to get some new teeth, that's a cinch. I'll buy your pie off you—three dollars."

"Oh, I wouldn't want to sell it to you, Hungry."

Our Mr. Hosford's face fell.

"I'd rather give it to you."

Hungry's face lit up.

"Later on, that is—maybe."

Hungry's face fell again.

"When?" he asked breathlessly.

"Well, I'll have to see. I'll give you my answer just before I start for town for the dance." He looked at his watch. "Any of you guys seen the telegraph messenger boy from town lookin' for me?"

Nobody had. The Dude decided to get fixed up for the dance. He wrapped his pie in a napkin and took it to the bunk house with him.

"Anything I can do to help you?" Hungry Hosford inquired anxiously, following him.

"Yes—find my teeth."

All the while that Dude McArdle was shaving and dressing, the conspirator gave an imitation of a fellow hunting lost false teeth. Of course, he didn't find them.

At a quarter of eight the Dude announced that he'd make up his mind in the next fifteen minutes whether or not Hungry got his pie.

At two minutes of eight the messenger boy from town arrived—but not with a telegram. He had a special-delivery package for the Dude about the size of a shoe box. Mr. McArdle tipped the kid a dollar for making an extra trip, and opened the box, while Hungry, in his nosey fashion, looked on. Inside was a lot of excelsior, and packed in that was a smaller box.

Just before he opened the little box, Dude McArdle said: "I've decided not to give you that pie, Hungry."

"Who you going to give it to?"

"Nobody. I'm going to eat it myself."

"But you've got no teeth!"

"Oh, yes, I have."

The Dude opened the little box and exhibited some new false teeth. One of the front ones was gold.

"Where did they come from?" the crestfallen Hosford demanded.

The Dude slipped the new molars into place and took a big bite of pie before answering.

"I been wanting some new teeth for a long time," he said. "Gee! This sure is swell pie! I've wanted a set with a gold tooth in them. I think a gold tooth is dressier. So when I got invited to the party last week, I ordered this new set from Chicago. They didn't show up as soon's I expected and I telegraphed this mornin' and got an answer that they were on the way and should arrive to-day. I wanted to wear them to the dance to-night." He finished the last bit of pie and mopped his lips with a bordered handkerchief. "Well, thanks for your help, Hungry."

The Dude put his hat on at a jaunty angle and sauntered out. At the door he turned back.

"Say, Hungry," he called, "if you should find them teeth of mine, you can keep them. I won't need them now. Maybe you can figure out a way to use them so you can eat twice as fast and twice as much. Besides, you'll have an extra set to gnash the next time you get kissed out of a piece of pie."

Hungry Hosford stood there dazed. Then he turned to me after a bit and said, "I wonder how he got wise."

The dumb-bell!

"I just can't imagine," I told him.

BLOOD-RED LAKE

As mysteriously as though some evil spirit had placed a curse upon it, a small lake, fifteen miles south of Maricopa, California, has changed from the color of clear crystal to an ominous ruby red. Formerly, the water was used for drinking purposes, but now it is so charged with mineral matter that it is impossible to use it to that end.

Now this being a scientific age, men have not shunned the spot for fear of offending unfriendly powers, but have investigated the cause of the change. University of California and Kern High School chemists immediately set to work on the case. The explanation of one chemist is that diatoms, tiny plantlike growths of the algæ family, have colored the water of this lake, just as they have colored that more famous Red Sea in the Old World.

Two Bronchos

By George Owen Baxter

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

TOM GLOSTER, gentle and strong, throws in his lot with young David Parry, son of a wealthy Argentinean. The boy has been sent to a Western ranch by his stepmother, who covets his inheritance for her own son. David's escort has been killed by her men. The youths decide to return to Argentina. A reckless rider, Christopher Black, overtakes and boards their train. On the ship, an attempt is made to poison their food. At Valparaiso, the poisoner, escaping, is seen to be Black. On a train journey, Felipe Guzman, who says he is Señora Parry's cousin, with a band of men unsuccessfully tries to persuade Tom that David is an impostor. Crossing the mountains, their guide is overheard by David betraying them. Nevertheless, Tom saves the fellow's life in an avalanche, and, grateful, he promises to befriend them. They arrive at an inn and learn that the famous Señor Christophoro Negro is in town. They realize that the señor is no other than Black. How to escape him?

CHAPTER XXIII.

GENERAL DUCOS.

EVEN such fear as had fallen upon the three could not destroy an appetite built up by the long ride of that day, and the accumulated hunger of their many days of journeying.

It was the Gaucho who said cheerfully: "If we have to die, friends, it is better to die full than empty.."

They went into the dining room, where only three or four tables were occupied by parties from neighboring estancias, and here they sat down at a corner table, for, as Ramon pointed out, here they had two friends—the two walls beside them.

When they came in, every one turned and stared at them for an instant; after that, not an eye was allowed to fall upon them, and Ramon interpreted with an odd nonchalance: "People stare at men who are about to die, but they really don't care. But these dogs of waiters should be a little more attentive!"

He stopped one, reaching out from the table and grasping his arm, as the fellow went hurrying by.

"Meat! Meat!" said Ramon. *"Carne con cuero!* And, mind you, we can eat a calf whole!"

The waiter acted as though he would have broken away and passed on; his face changed color; and Ramon added: "If you feed a starved dog, it does not mean that you are his friend or his master."

Then he let the man go, explaining to the other two: "He is afraid that if he pays any attention to us, he'll have his neck stretched with a rawhide rope! I told you that even the grass of the pampas obeys Señor Negro. Look around you! No one has a glance for us, as though they would catch the fever by looking at us, even!"

Ramon began to laugh. It was like the cackling voice of a goat, blatting and harsh. Yet, he really seemed amused by their situation. David said sourly to him:

"You are happy now for the first time. I've never seen you laugh before."

"I've never been happy in my life," said Ramon. "I've been more hunted than hunter. Therefore, why should I not laugh now? In that way, I defeat Negro. If I die happy, I have done more than another who lives sad."

"Why have you been more hunted than hunter?" asked Gloster.

"I'll tell you why," said the guide. "If you let a dog play with wolves, after a while he begins to think that he's a wolf, too. But he isn't. He never will have as strong a bite, and he can't run as far, and hunger will kill him more quickly.

"But I played with the wolves and I thought that I was one of them.

"I was as ready to cut a throat as the next man. However, after the throat was cut, my heart weakened. I ran off to the mountains and began to live there. I have lived there ever since, miserably. You see that when the pinch came and I had a chance to become rich and strong, and accepted by all the real wolves, I threw that chance away. I preferred to throw in with a pair of house dogs—pardon me, friends! —because they were more my own kind. That is another reason why I am happy to-night. I shall not die as a thief but as an honest man, and a good death is a great deal better than a good life. At least, so a wise man once told me. Though I have always thought it a strange thing that fifty years of crime could be washed out in ten seconds of good repentance."

Once more the ugly laugh of Ramon jarred upon their ears. Then food was brought to them, and a stale-tasting red wine. David hesitated before trying it.

"Once before we were almost poisoned," said he.

Ramon shook his head.

"Not even Negro would dare that—here among his own people. He would lose all his power in one moment, if he did that. Off there on the ship, with the ocean ready to bury you—why, that was a different matter, you see! But here, he has the pride of a good Gaucho, and a fighting man. He is as proud a man as there is in the world. He is as proud as the general, there!"

At this moment, as though to give point to the remarks of Ramon, through the door came a tall young man, flashing with colors, handsome, armed to the teeth. In fact, he leaned upon a long rifle as he paused in the doorway, and looked carefully about the room. He looked with care, but his eye was bright and disdainful. Then he crossed to a table in a far corner and sat down at it, with half a dozen companions near by. The waiters rushed to serve them.

"As if he were Negro himself!" said David grimly. "Who is the general?"

"He was a general in the last revolution. I forget on what side he fought.

But sides make little difference in a revolution. The chief thing is to have the fun of fighting. I have been in three myself."

"But you say that you never have been happy?" grinned David.

"That was only a manner of talking," said the Gaucho, grinning back. "If I get some more of this bad wine inside my skin, I shall have more cheerful thoughts."

"Was he a good general?" asked David.

"He was no general at all. But I'll tell you how he got the title. One day his party was beaten. They ran away. That night, this Carlo Ducos turned back and went inside the lines of the enemy, and found the general of that army, and shot him through the head. Then he took the general's horse and came back to his own people. After that, he took the title of general. No one dared to deny that he had a right to the name. He is as proud as a peacock. Imagine a man who calls himself a general because he has murdered a man who had a real right to the name! One is born with such a soul! This Carlo Ducos is a rascal, but he is amusing. There are a thousand Gauchos who love him because he will attempt impossible things. I could tell you stories about him. There was the town of San Castellar. Some people there hated Carlo Ducos. They set a trap for him, but he broke through the trap and came back with a hundred fellows as young and as fierce as himself. They burned San Castellar to the ground.

"'I cannot breathe peacefully until there is a little taint of smoke in the air,'" said Carlo Ducos.

"I tell you this so that you can judge that man for himself. Look at him now! Those are fierce men he is with, but he never looks at them. He is like an eagle sitting among hawks."

"Is he a friend of Negro?"

So asked David, and the Gaucho, his mouth filled with food, shook his head. Then he explained: "He's no man's friend. He's too free for friendship."

"What thing is that?" asked David sharply.

"A man with a friend is a man with the gallows' rope around his neck, grasped by another pair of hands. That is what Señor Ducos says!"

One of the men stood up from the table of the general and crossed to them. He stood close up to Tom Gloster and said slowly, in English: "Why do you look at us? Are we fish in a stream? Do you think that you can angle for us?"

Tom gazed at the man in horrified silence.

Then the Gaucho broke in: "Name of Heaven, señor, in what manner have his eyes done you a wrong?"

The other stared insolently and contemptuously at Ramon: "Since when," said he, "has dirt like this been allowed to sit at the table with men?"

Tom Gloster saw the knife wink in the hand of Ramon. His own hand leaped, and his grip paralyzed the arm of the Gaucho.

"This is not the way," said he. "The message was sent to me. If there is trouble, it is my trouble."

He rose quietly from the table; the emissary from General Ducos remained confronting him; but Tom was more aware of the white, strained face of David, watching them.

"If you have anything to say," said the messenger, "there are my ears to speak into, and outside, there is plenty of space for us two."

At that, a red haze glowed before the eyes of Tom Gloster and obscured his vision. He took the gay youth by either arm and gently lifted him and set him down again at one side. There the man remained, his face pale with pain, for the iron fingers of Gloster had bitten through flesh to the bone. Tom Gloster walked on; the Gaucho slipped

suddenly to his side. The room was silent. Grim faces watched their coming from the table of Ducos. Only "the general" retained his smile.

Up to that table went Tom Gloster and halted.

He said: "Señor, I am a simple man. I have not meant to offend you, but it appears that I have. However, if there is trouble, it should be between us, and not between me and another of your men."

The extraordinary straightforwardness and gentleness of Tom's manner made the dark, thin-penciled brows of the general draw together in wonder; and here, before he could answer, the Gaucho broke in in anger, real or simulated.

He said: "Señor general, has not Negro enough men already to do his work with us? Has the time come when General Ducos himself is let out for hire to cut throats?"

The general sprang from his chair. He was shaking with fury.

His men rose beside him, and Ramon, falling back a half step, exclaimed to Gloster: "Guard yourself, señor! We are about to die, but it is better to die at the hand of a man who was once great than to be killed by a monster like Negro!"

This cunning mixture of flattery with defiance at the last moment made the general hesitate.

"Dog," he said to Ramon, "before your end, you have time to explain how it comes about that you have said such a thing to me! I a hired man? I hired by the ruffian, Negro?"

It happened that at this moment David, greatly frightened, had come up between his two friends; Ramon, making a gesture, laid his arm about the shoulders of the lad.

"What else can I think, señor?" said Ramon. "We, who have defied Negro for the sake of this poor boy, know that Negro himself has surrounded the *fonda*. Inside the place, we are attacked by your men. What are we to think, except that you have been hired by him?" He added sadly, "Alas that such a lion should take a price from such a wolf! Such a carrion-eater!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

ONE WAITS AND LISTENS.

THE rage of Carlo Ducos was greatly abated. He replied to the cunning Ramon: "I have heard more from your lips than ever was said to me before. However, a dying man does not care where his bullets strike. As for hire, there is not enough gold in Buenos Aires to buy me. Except for fools, every man knows this."

"Señor," said Ramon, bowing, "if I had been in my right mind, I should not have thought such a thing. I never should have said it. But here we stand with knives at our throats. We begin to suspect every one."

Ducos rubbed his lean knuckles across his chin.

"Negro?" said he. "Here in this place?"

"Yes."

"For you?"

"For the boy, señor."

"The boy!"

"He has gone to the United States to murder him; he has followed him south again by sea; he has hounded him across the mountains; at last he runs him to the ground."

"And you two?"

"We have done our best to save him; now, at least, we can die for him!"

To this melodramatic speech the general replied with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Go back to your table," said he. "Afterward——"

They returned to their table. The room settled back again, with every man in his place. Only a subdued murmuring ran here and there, as the others

commented on what they had seen and the battle which so nearly had been fought.

The eyes of Ramon glistened like fire—or like the eyes of a cat in the dark.

"Look, friends," he murmured. "Now we have a chance. We have the fading ghost of a chance to escape!"

David shook his head.

"I have heard of General Ducos," said he. "I know that he is a brave man. But what is he here? Negro rules. You have said so yourself. If Ducos interferes the least bit, his throat will be cut as well, and nothing more made of it!"

"You talk like a silly child," said Ramon. "Let Ramon now think for you."

He drew in a breath like a man drinking.

"Life! Life!" exclaimed Ramon. "I take it in my finger tips, like a beautiful burning coal. I hold it now! I have snatched it out of the fire of danger! Did you hear me, friends? When Ducos turned on us like the monster that he is, then I spoke the right word. The hired man of Negro! The general will wake in the night and turn cold when he thinks of what I have said to him. A hired man! A cutthroat! Do you hear, now? He will have to try his best to save us, or otherwise it will be said that he, also, was bought and paid for the slaughter of us!"

"Ramon!" breathed the boy.

"I don't understand," said poor Tom Gloster, struggling terribly to follow through these intricacies.

"Hush, hush!" said David. "I begin to understand. Ramon—friend—your wits are worth more than the richest estancia in Argentina."

"See what an honest and modest man I am!" exclaimed Ramon. "I would sell them for half of that price."

"He will save us?" murmured Tom Gloster, who had just failed to notice the words and the changed attitude of the general.

"Because," said the Gaucho, "he saw that you are a man, friend, and because Ramon knew how to turn a new side to the fire. And so, we'll be nicely browned, perhaps, and not burned at all."

The grin of the Gaucho made David laugh with a world of relief and good nature.

"Do you think that he'll come to us again?" asked Tom.

"I know he will," said Ramon, with a nod. "Or else he will call us to him."

It was the former that happened. They had barely finished their meal and gone, all three, to the room of Tom and the boy, when the general opened the door without knocking and stepped in with a long and silent stride.

He said briskly: "You, señor!"

Tom Gloster stepped forward.

"Let us be quick," said the general. "I have learned that Negro is actually in the town. What should Christophoro Negro be doing in this town?"

"You have been told, señor."

"Is it likely," said the general, "that this boy, this slip of a boy, should be worth a chase through twelve thousand miles of sea and land?"

"My father is not a general," said David, "but you may have heard of Señor David Parry?"

The eyes of the general lighted.

"So, so, so!" said he. "And you put down one mystery and put up another. Why is the son of David Parry running?"

"Because he saw hawks in the sky, Señor General."

"Hawks cannot stoop through the roof or the glass of the window, my lad."

"What if some one wishes to leave a window open, Señor General?"

Ducos looked fixedly at David for another moment, and then he slowly nodded.

"That is not a very old brain," said he, "but it has learned something before this."

The Gaucho commented: "A knife is easily sharpened by friction, señor, is it not?"

"There you are again," smiled the general. "Where was your tongue sharpened?"

The Gaucho answered with his usual readiness: "It was sharpened in the service of my friends, señor."

"Keeping them amused?" smiled the general.

"A good lie often will outrun a horse, señor."

"Well," said Carlo Ducos, "I see that for such a keen Gaucho, and such a bright boy, and such——"

He turned and paused as he looked into the open, gentle, curious eyes of Tom Gloster, which seemed to dwell upon him with the kindly and vacant interest of an ox.

"And such an honest, honest man," said Ducos, "I must do something. But what I can do, I don't know, and how I shall go about trying to do it, is a mystery, also. This scoundrel Christophoro Negro is followed by every man in the town. For all I know, the walls and the floors of the room will tell him what I have said to you!"

"All that he says is entirely true," said Tom Gloster. "There would be a great deal of danger, and he has only a few men with him. Now, señor, suppose I should ask you to stay here to help us, I should be shamed. And if you wish to be free of any regret, ride on out of the town, and we will do the best we can with the luck that remains behind."

At this the general opened his eyes in turn.

"Do you invite me to leave you alone?" he asked.

"He talks carelessly," said the Gaucho, with much anxiety. "His heart is not in what he says, this simple man! Señor General, we throw our lives into your hand!"

The general nodded. "But do you think, friend, that your request has half the weight with me that the señor's refusal has had? I can say, now, that I have known a man modest enough to die rather than ask for his life. And not of an enemy, at that! No, no! The more I talk with you, the deeper I walk into the danger. Negro has now become my enemy. You are my friends! Listen to me! I was Gaucho before ever I was general, and Heaven forget me, if ever a true Gaucho forgets his friends. Only—what shall we do? Let us think quickly, without pausing to sit down. I may be followed here. Who can tell? The seconds count. But here are several sets of brains which are not quite asleep!"

They stared, one upon the other.

"What shall it be?"

"What can it be," asked the Gaucho, at last, "except to fling ourselves upon fast horses and rush out of the town?"

Don Carlo half closed his eyes and then shrugged.

"Yes," he said, "we all can die, in the end; and it is better to be shot on the back of a horse than standing in the dust, I have no doubt."

He waited for another moment.

"In a half-hour, then," said the general, and turned with his long, light, sudden step to the door. This he cast noiselessly open. It struck some obstacle. There was a muttered exclamation. And the general leaped into the dark like a tiger; like a tiger, too, he came back bearing with him a frightened man who shrank and turned pale before them.

It was the waiter whose services had been compelled by Ramon for the supper.

"He was crouched beside the door, listening," said the general. "Oh, what a great mule I was not to have this door watched! Search him, amigos!"

They searched the waiter. They brought from his clothes three knives—no less!—and a good, short-barreled revolver.

"We should cut his throat three times with his own knives," said Ramon. "Oh, dog!"

The waiter winced before him. Then he found his breath as he cringed away, saying:

"Gentlemen, I am very poor; I am very weak; I cannot stand against you; I have a wife, and I have four small children! For the love of Heaven, think of that!"

"Who hired you, man, to kneel there beside the door?"

"Hired me? Señor, I beg you to forgive! It is a child's curiosity that drove me. My heart bleeds, when I think what a fool I am. I could not help pressing my ear to the keyhole when I passed but now."

"Liar!" said Ramon. "Who paid you to come here? Who told you to do it, since they pay such dogs with scraps of food and kicks, and with nothing better."

"No one!" protested the trembling man. "No one, gentlemen, for who is there that would have told me to do such a thing?"

"You!" said the general tersely to Ramon. "Stab the traitor to the heart!"

The knife flashed in the hand of Ramon before Tom Gloster in his horror could protest; and the waiter slumped helplessly to his knees.

"Mercy!" he groaned. "It is true that Señor Negro sent me, and now he will cut me to pieces because I have told."

CHAPTER XXV.

INTO THE TUNNEL.

THE poor man was in a frenzy of fear. They sat him in a chair and stood about him. He swung his hands and groaned in his abject misery.

It was Ramon who said: "Has the clever Negro surrounded the entire place?"

"He? Oh, noble gentlemen, how could such a man as he forget anything?"

"But there are many ways out from a place like this. Think of them! If you are found with us, friend——"

The waiter groaned again. He was panting with desperate anguish. But he said: "Everything is watched, even the passage beneath the stable."

"What passage is that?"

"It is the old passage through the foundation, where they started to dig the cellar. He has two good men, even there!"

The general demanded how one could get at this place, and the other replied that it could easily be done—if they wished to put their heads into a trap.

"But there is a passage clear through?"

"Aye, señor."

"If the passage is blocked, we might blow out the cork, friends?" suggested Ducos.

They agreed eagerly enough. And their plans were laid suddenly.

Word was sent to the general's men that they were to make a complaint as to the food and the accommodations in the *fonda,* and make the complaint in the bitterest language, saying that the general wished to leave at once. Then they should go to the stable and there take out the horses of the general's *tropilla.* That done, they must bring the horses out of the patio and set all in readiness. At the sound of a pair of shots in rapid succession, they were to gallop the whole troop around the rear of the big *fonda,* and sweeping down the street behind it, they would, it was hoped, find Ducos and the others in waiting, if they had succeeded in forcing their way through the underground passage.

They started immediately on the execution of the scheme. The way to the

opening of the passage was fairly public, lying off a corner of the patio, but, moving in a loose group, they swiftly made for it. The general himself, on second thought, determined to take charge of his own troop. Whatever Negro and his men might suspect, there was little to make them actually attack Ducos except that he had been seen to exchange a few words with the party of fugitives, and such a presumption would have been too general to lead them to action unless they actually saw the general and his men assisting in an escape.

According to the waiter, every one in the town now knew that the three were persons wanted by Negro, and that a price was upon their heads—a price larger for Tom Gloster than for the other two combined.

"He is the thorn," said the Gaucho, grinning, "and after he is trimmed off Negro is pretty sure of picking the flower!"

And he nodded significantly at the boy.

Ducos was gone. The waiter and the boy, Ramon and Tom Gloster, started for the passage, and soon found their way into it. It led down as into a cellar, a wide and roomy space, damp and cool. The waiter fumbled for a door and found it; when it was opened, they saw a long passage before them, and at the farther end of it, a gleam of light which flared a little, and then died slowly away—the light of a burning and dying match.

They whispered for a moment together. If a brighter light were cast down the tunnel, it would fall full upon them and make them easy targets. However, they had hope, and they moved forward. And if they had no hope, despair would have driven them onward; for this was their only escape.

They gave the waiter into the charge of the boy, who marched him ahead with a bare knife held to his back. That left Ramon and Tom Gloster to handle the guards at the other end of the tunnel.

So they slipped on. It was not hard to progress in silence, for the footing was damp soil, without gravel in it. They passed on close to the point where they had seen the light, and here Tom and Ramon went forward together.

They moved very slowly, now. It had been agreed that they would use revolvers on the stop-gaps, but, if possible, they were to strike to avoid noise, by beating the watchers on the head with the butts of the guns.

Presently they turned a slight bend, and then they heard the murmur of voices.

Said one: "Will you sing, Pedro?"

"Ha, señor! Is that a thing to do in such a place and such a time as this?"

"You dog," said the other, "are you to tell me my duty and what is fitting here?"

"It is true that that does not seem wise," agreed the other in a subdued tone. "However, señor, the man who makes noise unwisely, is often lighting a lamp by which another can shoot him."

"Do you think that they ever can get into this place?"

"How should we tell? Señor Negro feared that they might or he would never have put us here."

"How could they learn? From the general?"

"No, he could hardly know about it."

"From the people of the hotel?"

"No one would be fool enough to help the three after Señor Negro warned us against them."

"How does Negro have such a power in this place?"

"He owns the *fonda,* señor, and his men are often about the town."

"Is he well liked here?"

There was a brief silence.

"I have no doubt that he is, Señor Guzman."

At this, Tom Gloster started.

Guzman again! Very strange it was that his trail was crossing and recrossing so often the men who had endangered him at the beginning of the work.

"Sing, sing!" said Guzman.

"In fact, señor, I do not find a song in my throat."

"You're afraid, then?"

"A little fear, perhaps, will keep a man's eyes open."

"You are no coward, man!"

"I have a knife for any one who says so. However, one can be excused for feeling just a trace of fear at such a time."

"How? When we sit here in perfect safety with guns in our hands?"

"But this man for whom we are hunting has done terrible things, they say."

"He's like any other man—made of flesh and blood and bone!"

"But Señor Negro could do nothing with him. Is it true that he has crossed the ocean and then the mountains in spite of Negro and all of Negro's men?"

"That? That's a lie, of course. Or if Negro has left him come, it's only to bag him more safely."

"But to come here and to bring the boy with him! That is something fooling, señor."

"Of course."

"Could it be that he does not know that this is the special town of Negro?"

"Perhaps. That must be it."

"Being ignorant, then, it would be a vast thing, would it not, if he were to get away again—and ever take the boy with him?"

"You talk like a fool!" said Guzman with severity. "Light a match for me; I have none!"

The match scratched, and as the flare spurted, blue and trembling, Tom and Ramon rushed upon the pair. It was Guzman who appeared before Tom, and the barrel of the Colt rang hollow and loud upon the skull of the rascal. Ramon, however, missed his first stroke, and the man fled with a cry. After him poured the others. They heard the steps of the fugitive clatter upstairs. They bounded up them in turn. A door was dashed open and a light gleamed beyond. Then the door was hurled shut, and a bolt clanked. In the distance, they heard the guard shouting wildly for help.

So neatly were they trapped. Ramon, groaning out a prayer to his favorite St. Christopher, hurled himself against the door. It flung him back.

"Dio, Dio!" cried the Gaucho. "The door is built all of iron, and I have broken my shoulder on it for nothing!"

"Room, room!" panted Tom Gloster.

He laid hold upon the inner ledge; he wrenched. Nothing gave. He leaned and slowly exerted all his enormous strength, and, behold, the frame of the door was rent suddenly away! Tom staggered to one side, dizzy with his own effort, and through the doorway pushed the other three.

Yonder was the guard, still shouting for help. And down the street came answering voices. So Tom raised his revolver and fired twice. Then they moved forward and found the outer door of the building into which they had climbed from the tunnel. However, this was a simple matter of smashing the lock with a bullet, and with the discharge, the door could be jerked open.

They stood on the slightly recessed threshold of the abandoned house. A block away the guard was still running, still shouting for help, and the answer was coming. For half a dozen men appeared low down in the lane, swarming rapidly forward toward them.

In the *fonda* behind them, bedlam seemed to have broken loose. Voices yelled; twice a gun exploded.

But now from the left there was a swift volleying of hoofs, and horsemen darted into view. The men of Negro, or the men of the general?

Suddenly they could see the general himself riding well to the front. He shouted. They ran out into the street, and in another instant they had tumbled into the saddles.

They bore straight on. The line of shadowy men with guns split to either side, afraid of such a charge. One or two guns were fired at random after them, doing no harm, and so they bolted into the main street and out upon the open pampas. Behind them, riding furiously, came the pursuit. But the general did not seem worried.

"Hai!" he cried like a boy. "This is better than winning a battle! I have made all Argentina laugh at Negro. That is enough to let one die happy!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

HARD TIMES AHEAD.

THEY maintained a stiff pace; the night was pressing down from the sky; and now they no longer could see the pursuit; only when their own horses went through a soft spot in the sandy soil, they could hear the beating of hoofs behind them. And General Ducos, in the greatest of spirits, drew his horse alongside that of Tom Gloster. He declared that it was the pleasantest evening he ever had spent, and that he would remember it to the end of his days. To assist Tom Gloster and his companions to such a memory, he wished them, with the most cordial good will, to retain the horses upon which they rode. And, when Tom resisted, the general became all the more firm. The horses they must take, to replace the mules which they had lost in the town, and which the villain Negro would doubtless appropriate and sell at auction! And when Tom insisted that this loss was no fault of the general's, Ducos laughed, and assured him that he had to vindicate the good name of Argentina, contrasted with the scoundrelism of such a fellow as Negro.

They rode on at a fine rate for nearly an hour, and still the significant, soft thunder followed them across the pampas, though drawn somewhat away toward the rear. Then Carlo Ducos suggested to Tom that the best plan would be for the three fugitives to draw off to the right, following their natural course, while he and the main body of his men drove straight ahead; for if they went softly on and made little noise, Tom and his two would hardly be noticed. This suggested maneuver appeared to Tom to smack of desertion, but at the thought, Ducos laughed loudly. He was not riding on into a strange land, he assured Tom Gloster, and if Negro and his followers persisted in the hunt very long, they would find themselves riding directly into a hornet's nest.

At full gallop, they shook hands; the thanks of Tom and his friends were hardly listened to; and the party split in two, Tom and David and Ramon turning off to the right in a depression which had once been a laguna, while the others pushed straight ahead through the night.

In the hollow of the laguna, the three heard the hoofbeats of the gallant general and his companions diminishing; and the crashing sound of Negro and his followers pouring after presently swelled, shook the earth, and rushed on in turn, while a puff of wind blew to the listeners a taste of the acrid dust they raised. Then they drew out of the hollow and went leisurely on their way.

Tom was so filled with emotion that he knew not what to do, and he knew not what to say. It was his first taste of great generosity on the part of any man, and the sense of it was new and wonderfully sweet to him. But Ramon declared that this was as nothing, and that every Gaucho was, in a manner, a true knight, ready to help the distressed.

"Yes," said the cynical David, "either

help the distressed, or else help them out of the world with a cut throat."

"Ha?" said Ramon. "This comes of living in the houses of the rich men; here every master is envied and here every servant is suspected. For my part, give me a big estancia, where my horse and I can lose ourselves and where the poor wretch of an owner has more debts than hard cash. There is always better feeding and better fun on a place of that sort; and there you learned how to become a good-hearted man."

"Thank Heaven that we met a man from such a good estancia when we met you, Ramon!"

"If I were your father, I would have you whipped for talking with a double tongue," said Ramon calmly. "But since I am only Ramon, I cannot do that!"

"Hush, hush!" pleaded Tom Gloster. "Let us all be friends. There will be trouble enough for us from others, without making trouble of our own!"

"That may be true," said Ramon, "but let us sharpen our tongues a little, now and then; otherwise, life becomes like plenty of good meat, with no salt whatever!"

This singular man was so full of contrasts and opposites that Tom never knew how to take him; but now they were fairly embarked upon the broad pampas, and they voyaged on day after day with little worth report. For two days, they made it a point to avoid the houses of ranchers which they saw. After that, feeling that they must have passed beyond the immediate sphere of Negro, they made free at every estancia that lay in their path.

No questions ever were asked of them. They would dismount at a low, stumbling, wretched-looking building of mud and corrugated iron, and putting their horses into the sheds, they would give them a hearty feed. Then passing into the kitchen they would chat for a time with the people they found there. There was always more or less of a crowd. For on every estancia it seemed necessary that the owner give shelter to a number of worthless, idle relatives who were good for nothing except to draw a knife in a time of fighting. Besides the relatives and their friends, there were idlers of another sort, men who attached themselves to the estancia as a sort of voluntary guard. These men rode out and worked the cattle when they felt like it. Otherwise, they remained lolling about the house, or else they would go off on wild rides and hunts. In addition to these rascals, there was the corps of hard-working peons, or Gauchos, usually smaller in number than either of the other two divisions.

The coming and going of strangers was hardly noticed in these swirling pools of changing life, and Tom lived well enough for food on the trip across the plains. In other respects, life was not so pleasant, especially at night. Never had he known such hosts of fleas, or such mighty biters, and worst of all was the terrible *vinchuca* which steals a man's blood without pain, and only after departure makes the wound burn with poison. The nights, therefore, were unpleasant at first, but afterward he grew more accustomed to such troubles.

They passed far away from the mountains. They were lost in a vast plain which made even the big stretches of the Western American cattle range seem small. For, through this green sea, they plowed their way endlessly, day after day, and always there was the same horizon, north, and south, and east, and west, unless they sighted an estancia. And once they went for three long days of journeying without sighting a human habitation of any kind. It would have been monotonous past words to tell of such an expedition, but Tom felt that it was by no means monotonous to actually ride in it. In this vastness of the

prairie, he felt the curve of the earth pressing him up into the sky; and he felt, moreover, the immense strength of Nature, which dressed this hugeness in grass, and fed millions of cattle upon it. And the old humor of humiliation and self-contempt grew in Tom every day.

His companions spent most of their time talking together. They were usually busy sharpening their already deadly tongues. They rode side by side, paying little or no attention to Tom. Sometimes they forged on before him, and sometimes they dropped behind. Sometimes he could hear their voices subdued, mocking, and he was sure that they were talking about him. At such times, his face would burn.

And again they were talking of far other things, forgetting him as completely as they would have forgotten a distant planet in the sky, and the heart of Tom Gloster was wounded. He never had been able to press behind the veil that hung before the mind of young David Parry; he still could not pas it. He could not tell whether the youngster looked upon him simply as a tool of some value in getting back to his home, or whether there was in addition a feeling of actual devotion and friendship. Often he asked himself these questions, and almost regretted, in his bitterness, that he ever had taken this wild attempt upon his shoulders.

Then came a day when the Gaucho turned his horse a little to the side and announced that he had made out the outlines of an estancia in the distance, but the boy refused to go on to it.

"We've come into the land where people know my father," said he. "I've been at that estancia myself. I know half of the men on it, and they know me."

"Why shouldn't we go there, then, and have a good cup of maté to begin the day right?"

"To the mischief with you and your maté," cried David. "You can't breathe and you can't think without it. Isn't that true?"

"But where's the harm?"

"You'll die one of these days for the sake of it. I tell you this: if we show ourselves at one of these estancias, now, surely within five minutes of our coming, a man on a fast horse will leave and ride like mad to get to my father's house."

"Why should he do that, unless he's your enemy?"

"Not that he is my enemy. But everyone knows that my stepmother hates me and that she sent me away. If I came back, especially like this, ragged and tattered, what would they say? Why, they would say little, but they would rush off at once and tell her everything and get the reward from her which they know they can expect. Oh, she has an open hand for those people who please her! And her soul is no bigger than the point of a knife, if you happen to make her angry!"

To Tom, these remarks, and others which he had heard before, had built up the picture of a demon in female form.

"How could your father have married such a woman?" he asked in amazement.

At this, without waiting for the boy to speak, the Gaucho broke out bitterly: "Because there's a streak of fool in him! To marry once is duty, twice is folly, and three times is madness, they say! He has married a second time—he has married a pretty face! Now do you hear me? I also married twice. The first time I married a fool; the second time I married a pretty face. Why should men marry a face? There are not more than five years of beauty in it, at the most. But still men follow the leader down the same trail of fools. Ha! If I had the making of marriages, I would have men draw wives by lot. Then afterward they could blame their

luck and not themselves. Women? The witches!"

He added:

"Not that I mean this about your stepmother, señor, who is a great lady, of course, and much above my criticism. Still, a man knows what he knows about life! I would bet ten dollars to one that it was for her face he married her!"

"There's no doubt of that," said the boy. "But let's forget her. The one thing for us to be thinking about is in what manner we can come close to the house and see my father. And now my stepmother is sure to have heard word from Negro that I have slipped through his hands. Perhaps Negro himself will be there to try to trap us at the last! Of course there is nothing really sure, except that our hardest time is the time that's just in front of us, friends."

CHAPTER XXVII.

RAMON'S RED WRIST.

WHEN they came in view of the Parry place, far off, it looked to them like a cloud on the horizon. When they came closer, they could make out a host of great trees which completely hid the house; but they could see an extensive garden spreading out beyond the trees which furnished the shade and coolness for the house itself. And these gardens, in turn, were furnished with hedges, and with lines of brush, and with patches of big shrubbery. On two sides of the house artificial lakes, fed by norias, made pleasant streaks of silver in the green landscape.

Young David showed great emotion. He left the Gaucho and turned to Tom Gloster, in this time.

"Look, look!" cried he. "There it is at last! I thought that I'd never see it again, but you've brought me back to it. You and Ramon, Heaven bless you! I think that there's luck in it. I think that we're all going to be rich—all the three of us! And there it is!"

He added, fiercely: "Think of what's going on inside her heart now, Tom! Think of what's inside her! She knows that we're voyaging closer and closer. She doesn't know when we'll arrive. She doesn't dare let my father know a word. But all the while, she's straining every nerve to get me! Oh, what torment it must be for her! She hates me more than ever, if that's possible!"

"Is there nothing good about her?" asked Tom, curious.

"Isn't it good for a woman to be beautiful and brave?" asked the boy.

"Yes, of course."

"Then she has that much good about her. Oh, she can be kind, too! There's Alicia."

"Who is she?"

"That's a cousin of my stepmother's. She is pretty young. You see how that could be, that my stepmother could be kind to her? Alicia's helpless. There's nothing for her except what she's given by her cousin. So my stepmother is mighty fond of her."

"Is she an orphan?" asked Tom, touched by this suggestion.

"Alicia? No—I mean to say, yes, of course she is! But she's not the kind that you'd call an orphan. I mean, there's nothing pitiful about Alicia, any more than there is in a bull terrier. She's a terror, all right."

"Alicia?"

"Yes."

"She's like your stepmother, then?"

"You bet she is, when it comes to temper and smartness. No, she's not the same, either. Alicia's straight, and sporting. You should've heard her stand up for me against her cousin."

"Did that make your stepmother want to turn her out of the house?"

"Of course it did, and she said she would turn her out of the house; and Alicia said that she wouldn't wait to be asked twice. She walked right out and

started across the fields. Think of that! With the fields full of cattle that would kill any man that they found off a horse! But Alicia is like that. She's all fire and does her thinking after she goes to bed, you might say.

"My stepmother had to run out after her and beg her to come back. And I'll wager that she didn't insult Alicia again for a few weeks. Yes, sir, they're like a pair of tigresses, when they go after each other!"

It gave Tom a most extraordinarily clear picture of a disturbed household, when he heard the boy talk like this.

"Why did she stand up for you?"

"Because she's so square and so sporting. She doesn't like to see the under dog downed, you might say."

"Well, that's a fine thing," said Tom.

"Fine? She's full of fineness. But —Heaven help the man who tries to marry her! She'd run on emperor like a lap dog. She'd have to have a couple of kingdoms to keep her busy, I suppose. You never could imagine such a girl!"

"Ha?" said Ramon. "You have described the wife for a Gaucho!"

"Have I?"

The boy laughed.

But they had serious thoughts on their hands, now. For they had to plan how they should approach the house. Evening was gathering, and that would permit them to come up fairly near; but it was almost certain that a close guard would have been posted around the place by the woman. It would take the cleverest of maneuvering to pass the posted men.

Ramon offered to attempt to scout the house, as soon as the darkness grew a little more complete, and when that time came he went forward on foot, having first shaken hands with his companions, silently.

Now they sat down to wait in the dark, easing the cinches of their saddles, full of suspense. They had come up to the den of the lion, and the bearding of the beast had begun.

They waited in this gloomy manner for well over an hour, when they began to be troubled.

"By this time," said the boy, "he's had time enough to sneak all around the house and come back again. He could have counted the wine bottles in the cellar, by this time! And still he doesn't show up. Confound him, what's he doing?"

He hardly had finished this, when Ramon came hurrying back to them. Even Ramon was excited. Trusting to the shelter of bushes behind which they crouched, he ventured to light a cigarette, as he said:

"I have seen everything. I can lead you on the way as easily as to walk down a safe road!"

"What?"

"I mean what I say. I have seen your father sitting in the library. The windows were open. I saw him clearly."

"At last!" breathed David. "Tell me —what was he like?"

"A big man, very big. Bigger than our friend here, perhaps. He wears a clipped mustache that sticks out like a horsebrush in front, except that the bristles are kept short——"

"That's he!" said David. "You saw him—and he didn't see you?"

"How could he see me? He was in a lighted room, and I was like a cat, looking in through the window!"

Ramon laughed in his triumph; he had talked so hard and fast that he forgot the cigarette, and now he lighted another match.

"Don't do that! You make as much light as a bonfire!" warned David.

The match flared, nevertheless, and Tom Gloster saw a streak of fresh red on the wrist of the Gaucho's coat.

Ramon began to smoke with noisy inhalations, so deep was his content.

"It is a great house!" said Ramon. "It is worth riding across the mountains

and the plains to bring a man to such a house. You won't forget me, when all the place is yours, friend?"

"Of course not," said David. "But now tell us how we can come closer."

"Why, it's an easy way. You come up to a place where there are three hedges running in toward——"

"Of course I remember that!"

"Well, there are plenty of men watching the gap between the hedges, but the second and third hedges are really very big."

"Yes."

"Like trees."

"Yes, they are."

"Very well, I tell you that the brush comes down almost to the ground on each side of those great hedges, but under the branches there is plenty of room to crawl along. That is something that I learned when I was a boy! I crawled almost straight up to the house. Then I came out, and I was under the window of the library, exactly as I told you."

"That is exactly where you would be, of course!" exclaimed David.

"Very well. I looked in at your father, and then I turned around and went back under the hedge and came back."

"And that took you two hours?"

"It isn't that long."

"Very near!"

"Of course, I didn't come straight back. I stopped under the hedge when I came close to where the men were. I wanted to find out what I could about them from their talk."

"You overheard them, Ramon?"

"I? Of course! They were not five feet away, at one time."

"Who were they?"

"One was Felipe Guzman."

"What? I smashed his skull, surely," said Tom Gloster, in amazement. "How could he be here?"

"That I don't know, except that his skull was not smashed at all. And there he is taking charge of the watch, at that point where I went into the garden."

"What did he and the others have to say?"

"A great deal about Señor Gloster, whom they say is a demon!"

"Ha? He is, for them," said David.

"Of course he is! He shall be more demon to them all, before the night is over! You will help, Ramon. You can swear that they tried to hire you to murder us, or lead us into the murder trap!"

"Yes, I can swear that. That is one thing that they are afraid of!"

"How do you know?"

"I heard them talk about it, and say that if they could get me away from you, you would have very little proof against her."

"But we have you with us!"

"Aye, Heaven be praised!"

"You have been very brave, and you have had great luck, Ramon," said Tom Gloster in admiration. "You had no trouble at all getting in or out?"

"No."

"Not a bit?"

"Oh, they're keeping a good sharp watch, but this Ramon is not a fool, even if your grandfather tells you so! I slipped through them and had not the slightest trouble in the world."

"I am surprised," said Tom Gloster.

"Thank you," said the Gaucho. "But I have done harder things than that!"

"But how," said Gloster, "did you get the blood on your wrist?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WITH KIND WISHES.

THERE was not much pause, after this question. There was hardly a half second's delay on the part of the Gaucho; but at some times the least delay is like the gap of an hour.

"Oh, as for that—Why, which wrist do you mean?"

"The left wrist," said Tom.

Ramon started to his feet.

"That? Oh, well, that is nothing. I scratched it on a thorn, going in."

Young David said, in a voice like the clang of a steel trap: "Why did you ask which wrist? What's wrong with the other wrist, Ramon?"

"And why do you ask?"

Ramon drew back a little.

Said Tom Gloster quietly: "Will you let us see your wrists, Ramon?"

"I? I?" said the Gaucho. "And why should I?"

"Because," said Tom, "I have this gun looking at you, and at this distance it could not fail to kill you, my friend."

From the throat of Ramon came a sort of strangled noise. After that, they could hear him panting, as though he had been running with the most violent effort.

He delayed when Tom told him to come nearer; but by this time, young David was behind his back, muttering: "Heaven forgive him! He's betrayed us a second time!"

"I?" said Ramon. "I have betrayed you? May I fall dead this instant if that is true! I betrayed you? *Dio!* Am I not here? Am I not ready to lead you safely to the house?"

"Safely into some sort of trap," said the boy.

"What do you want? You drive me mad with such talk!" said Ramon.

"Hold out your hands!" ordered Tom.

Slowly the Gaucho obeyed.

"Put your gun against his back and shoot if he stirs," directed Tom.

Then he lighted a match and examined the wrists; around each there was a chafed circle, such as a strongly bound rope would leave; the skin had even been worn away on the left wrist, and a small flow of blood had followed.

Tom raised the match and let its light flicker into the eyes of Ramon. Then he dropped the match hastily, to put out that miserable picture of ugly guilt.

"Very well," said Tom, "and you've done this again, Ramon? Ah, man, did you forget what we have done together, the three of us?"

Ramon did not answer.

"They caught you in the garden," said Tom. "They offered you money. And you sold us again, as you sold us before!"

Ramon did not speak.

Then David broke into a whispering fury.

"It's your right to send your knife into him, Tom. But let me do it! Let me have the finishing of him! Oh, the cowardly cur!"

"Hold on!" said Tom. "I don't know. I don't think that's the way."

"What is the way?" asked the boy.

"You're forgetting, David, that Ramon brought us safely through the mountains."

"You're forgetting, Tom, that you pulled the traitor up out of the danger of death!"

"Well——"

"Doesn't that pay him back?"

"You can't pay for services like that," protested Tom. "You have to understand how it is. You can pay money for food; and you can pay friendship with friendship; but you can't pay life for life. There's something left over, I think."

"That's a funny way to talk!" declared the boy.

"I suppose it is, and that you don't understand me."

"I do, sort of. But what's left over on his side?"

"Not much! I suppose, not much! I thought he was a good man," confessed Tom sadly.

"But what shall we do with him?"

"There is his horse. Let him ride away on it."

"Let him ride away!"

"Yes."

"To go and tell them everything?"

"He's told them everything, already."

"Tom, you don't mean to let the dog go?"

"I have to. I remember too many things—too many nights he's camped with us, too many times when he's been true to us. How could we have got out of the town through the tunnel, if Ramon had not been working for us and with us? Do you think that I could kill him, after that? I'd rather cut off my own arm than do such a thing!"

"But what can you mean by letting him go free to turn over to the other side?"

"That's what I'll have to do."

"I won't have it—it's plain craziness!" declared David.

"I'm sorry for that. Ramon, you are free to go."

"Am I free?" said the hoarse voice of Ramon.

"Not yet!" said David savagely.

"No, not yet," said Tom, "until I've paid you for the work."

"Paid him!" cried David.

"Light a match, Ramon," said Tom Gloster, "and I'll count out your money."

"Tom!"

"Well, David, what else can I do? He's done all that we asked him to do, and he's done a great deal more, as well!"

Ramon fumbled at a match. Then he groaned aloud.

"What is it?" asked Tom.

"Señor Gloster, good and noble señor!" said Ramon, and one great sob burst from his throat.

Then they heard sounds as of stifling, as the Gaucho choked back the emotion.

In the east appeared a pale patch of light; the moon was about to rise.

Then Gloster said: "I think that I understand, Ramon. After all, you work very hard; there is not much money in your life. Oh, I've seen other people do bad things for the sake of a few dollars!"

For he thought, with a sudden sadness, of his father, and his brothers, and his sisters, and the bitterness and the cruelty that reigned inside the walls of his father's house because they all were poor.

"I, who hung to the bush, sliding to death as the mule had died before me—I—I—— Ah, even in Heaven there is no more mercy than in you, señor! Let me speak and tell you!"

And he told the story, brokenly, stammering, and then composing himself to a greater steadiness so that the whole wretched narrative was made complete.

He had, in fact, attempted to get to the house in exactly the manner that he had described to his companions, stealing along underneath the hedge; there had been no treason in his thoughts; he was content to die, as he had thought, rather than to have betrayed his friends for a single moment. Instead, his heart was filled with devotion to them and to the cause of young David.

But suddenly he had been trapped by many hands. He was dragged out, stifled, and carried to a little distance, where a light was flashed in his face, and he saw Christophoro Negro himself standing before him, he whom Tom and the boy had known as Christopher Black.

"I thought that it was not Gloster," said Negro, in the bitterest disappointment. "There would have been no holding him with mere hands. However, we have the fox of the lot. We perhaps can get the lion and the cub afterward through him."

Then he had offered the Gaucho his choice between life and treachery, on the one hand, together with a pocket full of gold; and on the other hand, death immediate and horrible. And the Gaucho had asked for death.

But Negro was not content with mere words. He counted out a little pyramid of gold and held it in both hands before the poor fellow. And Ramon said that his eyes were dizzied and that his heart

turned sick with a hunger after that golden glittering. So he was seduced from his honor and from his duty and agreed that he would do his best to bring the other two into the trap. Even then, however, he stipulated that the lives of the pair should not be in any danger, and Negro, very willingly, had sworn solemnly that he would not injure a hair of the heads of the others.

"And did you believe what he swore?" asked David coldly.

"Alas," said Ramon, "I believed what I wished to believe, I fear! I saw the gold. Heaven forgive me, as you have forgiven me, señor. But how shall I forgive myself?"

Said David, as cold as ever: "What were you to do?"

"I am to bring you straight back to the house, just as I went myself; I am to go first, as if to show the way. The boy is to come next, and Señor Gloster is to come last, if I can arrange it so."

"And they?"

"They are bringing in their men from the farther side of the house and getting ready for a dreadful battle, for they fear Señor Gloster as if he were ten fighting men!"

"Do you see, Tom?" demanded David eagerly. "Something might still come out of it. Suppose what he says is true, and that really the men have been gathered to this side—we might slip in from the other side to the house!"

"And if it is not true?" asked Tom.

"Aye, that is the trouble! Or suppose they've left a good number still on the other side of the house?"

"You can stay here with Ramon, then, David. I shall go first and see if the land is clear on the far side of the house. Is that a good plan?"

"You'll go alone, Tom?"

"It's better to do that."

"And I'll stay here and watch Ramon. That will be the only way we can work. Oh, Tom, go softly as a cat! Everything hangs on you, now!"

"Send your good wishes with me," said Tom, in his gentle voice.

"Do you think that wishes will help you, Tom?" asked the boy in his sharp way.

"I believe in them," said Tom. "Heaven gives a sort of strength to kind thoughts, I think."

CHAPTER XXIX.

ALICIA, JERRY AND THE MOON.

UNTIL the rising moon stood behind his back, Tom Gloster circled eastward of the house. The landscape rapidly grew brighter as the moon climbed higher, and presently he could pick his way forward to the side of the big hedge that marked the outer boundary of the garden on this side. Beyond the hedge rose the great trees; and beyond the trees he had a glimpse of the long face of the house, turning white in the moonshine.

There was no difficulty about entering. It was an old hedge, and had grown up from the ground to such an extent that one could creep through it at many points. Tom crouched and looked through, to see a stretch of lawn, half lost in black shadow, half turned to silver by the moon. He was about to venture through, therefore, when he heard the slightest of brushing sounds, and he looked back in time to see the black silhouette of a man rising out of the very ground, as it were, and not twenty steps behind him.

Half turning, he gripped his revolver and waited breathlessly, as the man loomed bigger above him, the moon hanging like a great round ball of gold on his broad shoulder. But he went straight past Tom Gloster, and stooping, he worked through a gap in the hedge and crossed the lawn beyond.

He moved with the utmost caution, all this time, taking a good many minutes to pass from point to point, and often pausing to listen and look with

the utmost intentness. He disappeared presently into a thick clump of brush which rustled about him for a moment, and then left the garden to silence and the moon. Almost immediately after this, two armed men appeared at the farther end of the strip of lawn. They walked slowly across it, their rifles lying in the crooks of their arms; and from their bearing it was plain that they were sentinels on watch. These, too, passed out of sight, and Gloster at once crossed to the bushes through which the other stranger had gone. He was filled with wonder, for it seemed apparent that the man had moved in much fear, and, therefore, as one who dreaded the very guards against whom Gloster was on the watch.

Cautiously stepping through this arbor of bushes, Tom came out to the edge of a small clearing with lawn about it, and in the center of this was a little summerhouse, all open at the sides, except for light wooden pillars which supported the roof, and vines which twisted to the top and showered down again over the roof's edges. He had almost stepped from the trees, when he heard voices close by; and then he made out in the shadow beneath the summerhouse a man and a woman talking. They left the shadow and came slowly across the lawn.

"I tried twice," said the man. "I tried twice, and each time I nearly stumbled onto some men carrying guns. What's going on about here, Alicia?"

"Shall I tell you, Jerry?"

"Yes, if you can!"

"You'll think that it's only a legend, of course. It doesn't sound real."

"They have the place guarded like a fort!"

"It's David, it seems."

"You mean the brat of a boy?"

"Why, you never liked poor David!"

"I don't see why you pity him. He's a hawk, that boy. He always made me uneasy."

"Of course he makes people uneasy. He grew up too young, that's all. He had to grow up. Poor David!"

"But what of him? I thought that he'd been shuffled out of the picture."

"He was. Shuffled completely out of the picture. I don't know exactly what's happened. You know that Beatrice doesn't confide her schemes to me. But it's plain that David didn't arrive at the ranch in America to which he was sent. We've had a wire to that effect, I think. I don't know. But one hears whispers and rumors. There are so many men around the house, and all of them appear to know something."

"What do they say?"

"A fairy tale."

"About David? I could believe anything about him!"

"Well, try to believe this: That while he and his poor guard were going through the Western range country, they were tackled by a whole crowd of Beatrice's hired gun fighters——"

"How can you say a thing like that so blandly about your own cousin, Alicia?"

"I'm not saying it. I'm telling you what rumor reports."

"Then were they both bagged and killed?"

"That's the point. The Gaucho was killed. David got away. They rode in a mob after him, and when they were about to ride him down, a hero rode out of the woods and turned them back."

"Well, it's possible that he might have had that luck."

"But listen to this: The hero then grows tremendously interested in David and actually takes him off the range and starts to bring him back home."

"Do you mean that?"

"I'm telling you the story. Of course, I don't know what to believe. The story is that when Beatrice heard that her little murder plot had failed, she sent for the wildest, most intelligent, most terrible, most relentless monster of

a man that ever walked outside of a detective story. I mean Christophoro Negro, of course."

"I thought his real name was Black?"

"Perhaps. They call him Negro, down here."

"And that fiend was sent after the boy? Then David's dead and at rest at last!"

"Hold on, Jerry! You haven't come to the real point of the story, which appears to be that the strange young hero from the Western woods—Thomas Gloster is his name, I think—in spite of Negro, and all Negro's hired men, and Negro's wicked wits—well, in spite of all those things, Thomas Gloster, if you please, brought David to San Francisco, and then on a ship straight down to Valparaiso! And Negro on that same ship, mind you, all the time!"

Jerry seemed incapable of speech.

"And then," went on the girl, "this legend has it that Negro tried to stop them in the mountains and bribed their guide—and failed! And that then, by bad luck, they actually rode into Negro's own town—the place where he's king, I mean to say."

"Great Scott! What happened then?"

"They just rode out again, Jerry! No, it was better than that! They got that famous murderer and horse thief and good fellow, General Carlo Ducos, to give them a helping hand. And away they went for home!"

"You talk as if you actually believed all this myth!"

"Well, I know that Beatrice has been raging for days, recently. I know that she's growing pale and thin. Every one can see the anxious look in her eyes—every one except David's father."

"He never could see anything, of course."

"Not when Beatrice wants to hypnotize him. But she's afraid, now."

"What will happen if David gets back?"

"He'll have such a yarn to tell of attempted murder that even his father will have to rub his eyes and wake up. That's what Beatrice must fear."

"Then her hopes for her own boy will be ruined?"

"Yes, of course."

"Is she such a monster? And yet you're fond of her!"

They were moving slowly across the lawn, still, coming closer and closer.

And now the girl paused and raised her head a little so that the moon gleamed on her features, and Gloster could see a lovely, eager face.

"I'm fond of her. She can always be pleasant. Besides, she's kind to me; how else would I live except with Beatrice?"

"That's what I came to talk to you about to-night," said Jerry. "I wanted to know if you wouldn't consider a change of address—for a while, at least."

She turned her head toward Jerry and watched him for a moment.

"I thought that you'd say something to-night," said she. "You still want to marry me, kind, gentle, patient, generous Jerry?"

"I still want to marry you, my beautiful, terrible, cruel Alicia!"

"Why am I terrible?"

"Because you don't care about men. Because there's nothing that men can do to please you."

"A thousand things."

"Will you name one of them?"

"Go and find David and bring him to the house!"

"Do you mean that?"

"No, I don't. I don't want them to shoot at you, Jerry, because they shoot much too straight."

"Why do you care so much about David?"

"Because he's only a child; because he's having a cruelly unfair deal; and because that strange fellow from the West has done so much to bring him home."

"I'll go this moment to find what I can find. But if I try to bring him in, Mr. Parry will have me thrown off the premises again."

"That's another thing that you'd have to chance."

"I'm gone now. I mean to say—there's no use seriously asking you to pay any attention to what I really want, Alicia—yourself, that is to say?"

"Oh, I don't know! I hope that you'll still be patient for a while. I'm pretty young; I may grow older almost any day and give up this idea of mine about the sweeping, crashing, tremendous, overpowering emotion that ought to be love."

"I think you will change your mind about that. Then?"

"Then, of course, it would be you, Jerry. If you were poor, then I'd trust myself to marry you even now, and make a good wife; but you're rich, and wealth tempts me terribly."

"I'll chuck the money into a laguna."

"You'll do nothing of the sort. You'd better go home."

"I've worked very hard to get in here to-night, Alicia."

"I know you have, and I thank you for coming. But I have to go back to the house. Beatrice sees everything; and what she doesn't see, she can guess at!"

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

THE FORESTRY SERVICE HAS A BIRTHDAY

WHEN one thinks of "the forest primeval" one thinks simultaneously of a "green old age," and it is hard to realize that the forestry service, at the age of fifty-three, is comparatively young. But the *Forestry Almanac*, which is published by the American Tree Association, is not likely to be at variance with the calendar, and it is this authority which tells us that it was so long, or so short, a time ago that the United States first took measures to protect the forests.

A single man was engaged to make a survey of the forest resources in those days and a small sum was appropriated by Congress for that purpose. Now the forestry service is an important branch of the government activities, and to no citizens of more interest than to those of the great West.

The edition of the *Forestry Almanac* is always full of interesting information and valuable suggestions for foresters and layman alike, and includes forestry figures not only from every State but from many nations of the world. It is announced that this is the only almanac of forestry issued on the Western continent and that it is unique in its relation to the science of forestry.

Turkey Heaven

By Howard E. Morgan

Author "Choose Your Partners," etc.

"LOOKS like a storm," "Pudge" MacFarland announced, squinting up at the black clouds and taking a lazy man's stroke with his paddle. Despite his roly-poly body and round, red face Pudge was inclined to pessimism.

Zack Hardy, hatchet-faced, and lean almost to the point of emaciation, grunted and grinned behind his grizzled beard. "So's yore ol' man," he muttered, making use of a meaningless phrase he had so often seen in the newspapers. "Yessir, so's yore ol' man," he repeated, as though striving to lend point to his pointless comment. His paddle bit deep into the black water. "Them ain't nothin' else but wind clouds; an' who cares about a little wind? But can't you jest smell them there turkeys a-sizzlin' in 'Frenchy's' oven, Pudge?"

From which it may be inferred that Zack, although skinny, and dour of feature, was the optimist of the two.

Pudge's fat-hidden eyes rested almost lovingly on the three turkeys—a big gobbler and two hens—squeezed into what had been an onion crate, in the body of the canoe. "Yeah," he said, moistening his lips. "They sure will taste good. An' we was dog-gone lucky t' git 'em; they was 'Stuffy' Groat's last three turks. Turkey sure comes high, nowadays. Expect he stuck us at that."

Zack Hardy loosed his paddle long enough to snap his fingers. "Who cares?" he demanded. "Thanksgivin' only comes oncet a year. An' turkey sure is a delica—a-a—delica—is suthin' swell when it comes to eats. An' Frenchy sure can cook 'em. He——"

"Here comes the wind," Pudge interrupted.

The little canoe was just snaking out of Bitter River into Windy Lake, on the opposite shore of which was their destination, Frenchy La Salle's cabin. The instant they struck the larger body of water the wind slapped down upon them. In a few seconds the entire lake was covered with dancing whitecaps.

In the center of the big lake, Devil's Island popped up out of the spray like an anchored cork in a frothy mill stream. Both men bent to their paddles, neither for a single instant considering turning back. They worked like Trojans, with that perfect coördination which is possible only with two people who have together faced many tasks and encountered many dangers.

Windy Lake came honestly by its name. It was a considerable body of water about fifteen miles across at its widest spot and ten miles at the narrowest. Devil's Island—a snake-infested rock pile half a mile in diameter—jutted up in almost the exact center of it. It was toward this uninhabited island that Zack Hardy, in the bow, steered the wind-driven canoe. La Salle's cabin was directly behind Devil's Island; about five miles of unbroken water intervened between the island and Frenchy's place on the far shore of the lake.

"Don't git too close now," Pudge called over his shoulder. "You know how——"

The rest of the fat man's warning was drowned by the blasting wind.

Old Zack, of course, had had no intention of drawing near Devil's Island, not too near, that is. With the wind at his back, he was merely seeking for the most direct route across the lake. But during the next few minutes the wind seemed to redouble in volume and intensity. Zack temporarily devoted his every effort to keeping the heavily loaded canoe lined up with the blustering gale. This in itself was no simple task. The wind struck them in fitful gusts, slapping them first on one side and then on the other. If one of those gusts should strike them broadside, they would instantly overturn. Zack Hardy was altogether confident of his ability with an ash paddle; nevertheless, when he considered what the loss of the contents of that canoe would mean to him and Pudge, his old heart skipped a beat. There was nothing of any great intrinsic value in that canoe. But—those three turkeys! Thanksgiving dinner! Thanksgiving was the one day in the year which he and his partner celebrated with all the joyous abandon of two small boys. On at least ten Thanksgivings out of the twenty during which they had been partners, Zack and Pudge had enjoyed a turkey dinner, with all the fixings, prepared by Frenchy La Salle's skilled hands.

Occupied as he was in suiting the canoe's course to the antics of the wind, old Zack was not aware of the nearness of Devil's Island until he heard a cry of startled dismay from Pudge MacFarland. The spray-washed rock pile loomed up less than a quarter of a mile ahead. The wind was sweeping the canoe head on toward the exact center of the island!

It was not until he attempted to turn the nose of the boat about so as to circle the rock pile that Zack Hardy truly appreciated the velocity of the moist gale at his back. They were traveling at express-train speed. Without waiting to be told, Pudge backed water in a frantic attempt to slow their progress in order to allow Zack opportunity to swing around the rocky nose of the island. Zack did likewise. Icy spray splashed into the canoe as it lay almost on its side, facing into the wind at a sharp angle.

Both men realized almost at the same instant that they would be unable to miss Devil's Island!

Neither was particularly frightened, however. Together they had many times faced more dangerous situations than this. The same thought was uppermost in the minds of both: How to save their own necks, and at least one of the three turkeys and thus insure their Thanksgiving dinner.

The flimsy crate would not float, that was evident. Zack Hardy found him-

self wondering vaguely if turkeys could swim. He reviled himself for having failed, during all those years when he had been upon more or less familiar terms with turkeys, to satisfy himself upon this point. It was Pudge MacFarland who made the first move toward the saving of the precious cargo. When convinced that the canoe would run full tilt upon the rocks, he relinquished his paddle, swung about, and began ripping the slats from the onion crate. With quick, sure movements he removed the top. The frightened birds made no attempt to escape; instead, they huddled there, squawking, in the bottom of the crate. Pudge was just reaching for the gobbler when the unforeseen happened.

The canoe struck a saw-toothed ledge of hidden rock. With breath-taking speed the boat swung clear about, landed right side up on a heap of driftwood, then slithered forward and crashed, broadside, into the island's rocky wall.

Both men hit the water at almost the same instant, and disappeared beneath the waves. The onion crate containing the turkeys landed on its side on a pile of driftwood well up among the rocks. The three frightened birds clambered out onto solid footing, and promptly scuttled for the surer safety promised by the black rocks that lay above the water line.

Pudge MacFarland, due to his greater buoyancy, was the first to come sputtering to the top. Puffing and blowing, he wrapped his fat arms about a floating log and looked about him. His first thought was of the three turkeys. He was not in the least concerned about his partner. Zack Hardy could take care of himself, in the water or anywhere else. Pudge glimpsed the twenty-pound gobbler just as it scurried into a crevice up on the rocky wall and disappeared from sight. Zack Hardy's grizzled head popped up suddenly at Pudge's elbow.

"The turks!" he gasped with his first full breath.

Pudge could not explain in detail. He merely shook his head sadly. Zack blinked away the icy water and swore. Just how the three turkeys could have disappeared so completely in such a short space of time he could not quite figure out. It did not matter what had happened to them, however; Pudge had indicated that they were gone. That was all there was to it.

A big log, rubbed smooth by the action of the water, jolted Zack in the ribs. He relinquished his hold upon two smaller sticks of driftwood and threw himself on the larger log which had struck him.

The wind had increased in velocity and volume. It was colder, too. There was snow along with the rain that pelted the two shivering old miners.

Zack recovered one of the paddles which had been thrown free of the wrecked canoe. The second was nowhere to be seen. Pudge possessed himself of a pine slab. Together then, the two shivering men pushed and pulled at the floating driftwood until the big logs to which they clung were riding free in the open lake.

Both realized that it would be foolish to land on Devil's Island. They had plenty of dry matches; but none knows better than a woodsman the difficulties incident to building a fire with wet wood. The island was almost devoid of vegetation; it was literally alive with snakes. They had lost all their camp duffel, their food, and even their guns when the canoe had hit the rocks. The storm might last for days. Even though they were able to build a fire, without food and shelter, Devil's Island would afford a mighty uncomfortable haven. On the other hand, it was less than five miles to the far shore of the lake—and Frenchy La Salle's cabin. The logs they rode were light and sturdy. The wind would hasten their progress. They

would, therefore, continue across the lake.

If the element of danger had not been so evidently present, the sight of the two old partners, rain-drenched, shivering, astride the bobbing logs, slithering before the wind across Windy Lake's foam-flecked surface, might have been comical. As it was, Zack Hardy laughed when, thanks to his lighter weight and the paddle, he passed Pudge.

But there was no laughter left in either of them when, hours later, half drowned, chilled to the bone, exhausted, they were tossed out upon the shore. It was night and pitch dark. Neither of the castaways was, for the moment, able to stand. This disability was only temporary, however, and, just before midnight, Frenchy La Salle was routed out of bed by his two expected guests. These guests were, however, minus their usual Thanksgiving offering.

Although neither Pudge nor Zack were young men, they experienced no unpleasant effects of their adventure. Thanksgiving was, however, a dismal failure. Frenchy did his best with the edibles at hand. There was, for instance, an abundance of cranberry sauce, and plenty of bread-crumb dressing highly seasoned with sage. But these only rendered the absence of the toothsome turkey more painfully noticeable.

There was still another circumstance that served to make this particular holiday a dismal day indeed: The three turkeys were safe and sound on Devil's Island; but the storm continued with unabated fury, and no boat could possibly withstand that pounding water.

A few days later Zack and Pudge took leave of Frenchy and returned to their claim in the hills.

Things did not go well with the partners that winter. Game was scarce. It was bitterly cold. Shortly after the first of the year Zack developed the scurvy. By spring their prospect began to show definite signs of petering out.

"I tell you, Zack," said Pudge, the pessimistic, "we're in fer a spell o' hard luck. It all began the day we lost them turks——"

Zack interrupted, laughing loudly. But he could not think of anything to say to combat his partner's statement. Everything had gone wrong since that unhappy day when they had lost their Thanksgiving dinner.

And ill-fortune in various guises continued to follow Pudge and Zack. Thanksgiving Day the following year found them one hundred and fifty miles from Frenchy La Salle's cabin, working frantically twelve hours a day, for a laborer's wage, panning gold in a little stream which had been over-prospected.

In November, two years later, the old sour doughs arrived, broke and despondent, at Bain City. It was here, from Stuffy Groat, which each autumn imported a number of live turkeys, that they, in their prosperous days, had purchased the material for Frenchy La Salle's culinary skill. But this year they had no money. Their claim on the far side of the Kosokoff Range had netted them little more than enough to give them clothes and food. Although their credit was good in Bain City, both would have starved rather than trade on it.

In only one direction would either think of looking for that which amounted to alms. This direction was the north, Bitter River, Windy Lake, and, specifically, Frenchy La Salle. In the old days, before Frenchy's rheumatism had crippled him so that he could scarcely hobble about, Zack Hardy, Pudge MacFarland, and Frenchy La Salle had been partners. Even yet they were closer than most brothers. What was theirs was Frenchy's, and what Frenchy possessed was theirs. So it was that, two days before Thanksgiving, when convinced that no stroke of good fortune would

enable them to purchase the makings of a Thanksgiving dinner, the thoughts of the old sour doughs turned toward Frenchy La Salle. Their partner was also poor as a church mouse, but he was a marvelous cook and able to prepare tasty repasts from practically nothing. Although it was a foregone conclusion that Frenchy's slender means would not permit of his having turkey, he would have all the rest of the fixings —cranberry sauce, sweet cider, perhaps, and lots of good coffee.

And so, on the day before Thanksgiving, the two partners unearthed their old canoe, which had outgrown its useful life several years before and had been discarded. They patched up the old boat as best they could, and early next morning pushed out into Bitter River's swift current, bound for Windy Lake and Frenchy La Salle.

As they went, the two old men were painfully solemn. "'Tain't only us which is out o' luck," Pudge finally ventured. "Seems like they ain't been no luck nowhere this last summer."

Zack Hardy agreed. This year it seemed that there had been very little gold found in the hills. In Bain City there had been a dozen or more of their old friends, all painfully lacking in this world's goods.

"Mebbe we should've brought a couple o' the boys along," Zack finally hazarded. "Frenchy wouldn't mind."

Pudge MacFarland grunted doubtfully. "Better wait till we get there," he said. "If Frenchy happens t' be flush, we'll send that kid o' his back an' have some o' the boys out."

The old canoe performed very well, considering its age. It was still early when they reached the mouth of Bitter River, and the massy rock pile of Devil's Island appeared before them. Neither said anything, but the expressions on their faces reflected glowering hate. Both had come to feel that Devil's Island was, in a way, responsible for the bad luck which had dogged them for so long. They bore that forbidding rockpile a personal grudge.

Zack's eyes were considerably better than Pudge's; hence, it was he who first discovered that Devil's Island was inhabited. With a muttered exclamation, the old miner dropped his paddle and picked up his rifle. With the gun at his shoulder, he hesitated. When he finally fired, Pudge, who had been totally unaware of his partner's actions, yelled and jumped, nearly upsetting the boat. He turned angrily.

"What the——" he began.

But Zack had exchanged his rifle for the paddle and was swinging the nose of the canoe about, pointing straight toward Devil's Island. The water churned behind the boat under Zack's strong strokes. Pudge did not question. His own paddle bit deep into the water. The prow of the canoe slithered gently through the floating mass of driftwood that fringed the island, and came to rest on a strip of gravelly beach. Old Zack leaped ashore and scampered up over the surrounding rocks.

Pudge followed slowly, wondering. At the top of the first incline, he came to a gasping stop. Zack Hardy, rifle in hand, faced him, grinning from ear to ear. His lips were moving, but it was evident that, in the excitement of the moment, he could find no words to fit his state of mind. In his right hand he held a turkey. A gobbler, and quite the largest one Pudge MacFarland had ever seen! Old Zack had dropped the bird with that single well-placed shot. But that was not all. There were other turkeys there. Hundreds of them, it seemed. They darted here and there among the rocks, little ones, big ones, hens, gobblers—the air was hideous with their squawking clamor.

Pudge stood open-mouthed, while Zack claimed four more of the largest birds. Then, still speechless with as-

tonishment, he helped carry the dead turkeys back to the canoe.

It was not until they were pushing their way across the lake toward Frenchy La Salle's that they spoke.

"It was a gobbler and two hens we lost, warn't it, Pudge?" Zack finally said.

Pudge McFarland nodded.

"They got loose on Devil's Island," old Zack went on, as though talking to himself. "Turkeys dotes on snakes. They been livin' there an' raisin' their families. Why, dog-gone, they must've been a hundred of 'em, Pudge!"

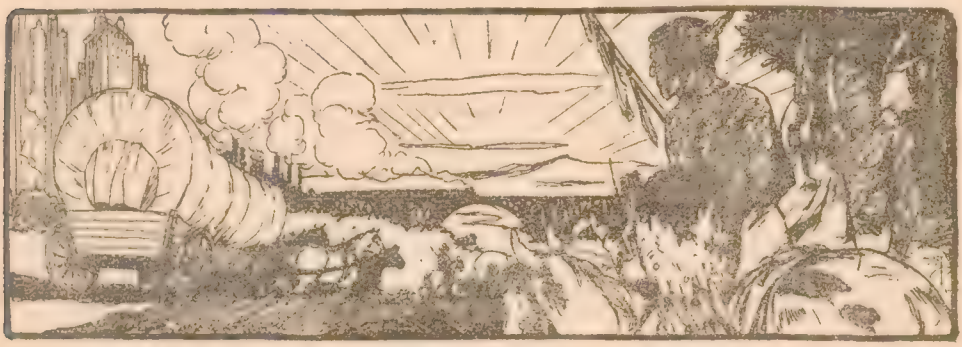
Pudge McFarland nodded again. His round face was wreathed in smiles. "Reg'lar dog-gone turkey heaven," he finally contributed.

Arriving a couple of hours later at Frenchy La Salle's cabin, they found their old friend fatter and jollier than ever, if this were possible. As soon as they were assured that Frenchy had plenty of the "fixin's," they dispatched Joe, an Indian lad whom Frenchy had adopted several years since and who passed as his son, to Bain City. The bright-eyed lad grinningly made clear his understanding of his errand.

"Tell 'em we got lots o' turkey, Joe," old Zack repeated. "Tell 'em all t' come. There's a dozen or more thar. Explain it all out to 'em so they won't think they're spongin' on us. Understand?"

Joe nodded and hurried away.

The guests began to arrive shortly after midday. By midafternoon half a dozen canoes had beached before Frenchy La Salle's cabin. All told, twenty grinning old sour doughs that day partook of Frenchy La Salle's Thanksgiving dinner.



THE MURDEROUS APACHES

IN the wilds of the Sierra Madre Mountains of Sonora, Mexico, still live a small band of murderous Apache Indians. In 1926, these descendants of the most famous of Indian chieftains in the Southwest captured the young son of Francisco Fimbres, a prominent Mexican cattleman. The father fears that the child is being held by these outlaws with the intention of bringing him up to lead them in still greater crimes when he shall be of suitable age. He recently started in pursuit at the head of a band of white men. The party disappeared into the Indian-infested mountains and have not since been heard from. Officials on both sides of the border fear that the Apaches surprised and murdered their pursuers.

The last sally of the Apaches into American territory took place in 1924 when they came north in the spring and remained in the Big Hatchet country of New Mexico all summer, raiding and pillaging. Though pursued into Mexico by the deputy sheriff and his posse, the Indians made good their escape.

A Good Cook Anyway

By James Edward Hungerford

YEP, Bill Simmons he was yearnin'
  Fer to hit the trail due West
An' his heart was fairly burnin'
  An' his soul, it knew no rest.
All gents had to do, he figgered,
  Was to rove about the land,
With two six-guns, lightnin'-triggered,
  That they pumped with either hand!
Well, his money he kept savin',
  Till he had a good-sized roll,
Then he hit fer that far haven
  He had dreamed of—reached his goal.
He was "nix" at ridin', ropin',
  Brandin'—yep, an' all the rest,
As with suit case he came slopin'
  Out into the Golden West.
Well, a ranch boss looked him over,
  An' he found by hook an' crook
That "Wild Bill," the reckless rover,
  Was a first-class, A-1 cook!
Now you'll find him flappin' flapjacks,
  Bakin' bread, an' pie, an' buns,
An' the rest o' them there jimcracks
  Where *good* cooks ain't needin' guns!

Wild Ones

By Harley P. Lathrop

Author of "Holed Up!" etc.

IT was a Sunday afternoon and in company with old "Farobank" Cook, I sat tipped back against the adobe-walled hotel of which he is proprietor. I was on my annual pilgrimage up to the sun-drenched New Mexican mountain town of Mora to take in the fiesta of Santiago, due to commence the following Tuesday. The day was hot for so high an altitude and the air as soothing as rare old wine. I don't remember dozing off, but I plainly recall the abrupt awakening.

"By grab and seven hundred dollars!" I heard old Farobank exclaim, his elbow simultaneously colliding with my ribs. "By brag and seven hundred dollars! Now what might that be?"

When I opened my eyes and regarded the approaching cavalcade I could well understand Farobank's wonder. For without doubt the procession moving up the narrow street was the first of its kind ever to come to Mora.

At the head crawled a towering, van-like motor vehicle. Its bulky body was painted a glaring crimson, and against this vivid, scarlet background some artist whose sense of the dramatic far outweighed both his technique and value of proportion, had depicted an undersized cowboy ir the act of subduing an oversized broncho.

Trailing the van was yet another vehicle loaded with canvas and snugly stowed tiers of planks and risers, which when erected to pattern would form conventional circus seats.

At the tail of the procession four riders drove a small remuda of horses. The lead rider was a beefy, red-faced man whose range regalia was so heavily bedecked with silver trimmings that he jingled like a bag of coins. Unquestionably, if appearances were any indication, he was proprietor of the out-

fit. The two flank riders were lanky, leather-faced individuals each one of whom looked as though he might have been cradled in a manger and raised on the hurricane deck of a cow pony.

The tail rider was a light-haired, small-framed, young fellow who did not look like a cowboy although he sat his horse gracefully enough. He appeared altogether too small and frail in comparison with his hard-bitten companions.

By the time I finished appraising the oncoming parade, the van had angled broadside and was making the turn into the small plaza between the back of Pedro Ballanda's store and St. Anthony's churchyard. Old Farobank, his eyes goggling, proceeded to read aloud the following caption which headed the artist's effort:

"'MESQUITE MIKE'S' WORLD-FAMED RODEO
A THOUSAND DOLLARS YOU CANNOT RIDE ONE OF OUR WILD ONES
A THOUSAND DOLLARS WE CAN RIDE ANYTHING YOU LEAD INTO THE ARENA.
OWNERS BRING YOUR BAD HORSES.
RIDERS BRING YOUR SADDLES.
GENERAL ADMISSION—50 CENTS."

"Live and learn," Farobank grunted, after the van passed by. "Just what sort of a sho-fly game might that be, now?"

"A traveling rodeo," I explained. "In line with what you just read, Mesquite Mike, who, I judge, is yonder red-faced gentleman, offers to bet that no one can ride one of his horses. Then, to even up matters, he stands ready to wager that his riders can top off any local bronc you may produce. The contests will be held inside a tent and Mike will charge the public fifty cents a head to witness the exhibition. Usually, it's worth the money, too."

"H'm," commented Farobank noncommittally, and let his gaze rest on a sign decorating the side of the second vehicle. This made known that the show's three riders were "Pendleton Phil," "Pecos Pete," and "The Texas Kid." The last of these names served to liven Farobank's recollection of former days.

"I mind years ago, when I was in Dodge City, I met up with a left-handed lad called The Texas Kid," he began reminiscently. "We got right chummy and one night set in a poker game with a couple of card sharps from Abilene. About midnight I caught one of 'em in a crooked deal, and he pulled his gun. It looked like boot hill for me till the Kid horned in and——"

It was a familiar story. At least a half dozen times before Farobank had described to me that epic encounter, explaining how when his gun jammed, his companion interfered and by some rapid and accurate left-handed shooting saved his life. That's one fault with Farobank; like many old-timers, he's prone to repeat. So I leaned back and closed my eyes while his voice droned on relating how after the battle the Kid immediately "high-Henry'd it outa there fo' Texas, without sayin' good-by or anythin'," thus leaving him everlastingly in his debt.

Eventually the murmur ceased, chair legs met the stone sidewalk, and steps moved off. Without looking, I knew that the old man had decided to make a first-hand investigation of the new attraction. That was the last I saw of him until noon the next day.

By that time the little mountain town began to assume a fiesta aspect. Flags and bunting decorated the front of every adobe, booths occupied every vacant niche, while wagon upon wagon, filled with entire families, rumbled heavily past the hotel and turned up the Guadalupeta road to the camping ground beside the river.

In front of St. Anthony's church the brown canvas sidewall inclosing

Mesquite Mike's rodeo, bellied in the breeze, and by nightfall it became evident that Mora had fallen hard for this new attraction. The performance was billed to begin at eight thirty, but long before that time all trails led to the plaza.

I loafed outside the hotel with Farobank, watching the people pour into the square. He was skeptical about the merits of the exhibition.

"Yo' know right well the' ain't goin' to let no hoss pitch in a little place like that," he scoffed. "Why, a real wild one would wreck the whole outfit, seats and all."

Nevertheless, as people continued to swarm into the plaza, he became restless, and finally when a bevy of riders hazing several half-broken horses passed the hotel in the direction of a horse tent behind the main inclosure, he yielded to the pressure.

"I reckon we might as well take it in, after all," he remarked, starting to his feet. "That piebald mare in the center of yonder bunch is a stem-winder. Likely she'll disrupt the works. Let's go see."

Presently we were surveying what, to me at least, was a familiar scene. The show tent was roofless and approximately one hundred feet long by seventy-five feet wide. Tiers of circus seats shelved downward, leaving a narrow aisle between the lowest seat and a yard-wide strip of canvas which inclosed the arena proper. This arena was lighted by a score of flaring gasoline torches which, fanned by a brisk night breeze, sputtered redly. Not a seat was to be had, so we were forced to find places in the aisle.

Presently a stocky sorrel was led forward from the horse tent and Mesquite Mike, a fistful of bills in either hand, took his place beside the pony's head and addressed the audience.

"Ladees and gentlemen," he began in a stentorian bellow, "we have here Red Dynamite, a five-year-old sorrel hoss. While this hoss is as gentle as a kitten"—here, by way of emphasis, the showman slapped the sorrel familiarly on the flank—"I nevertheless claim there is no one among the audience who can stay aboard him one minute by the watch without grabbing leather. Furthermore, I stand ready to back my convictions with any amount from one dollar to one thousand. Are there any takers?"

Now, as Mesquite Mike was well aware, the psychology of riders is peculiar. At events like this they invariably gang together like a flock of blackbirds. So he let his gaze rove over the audience and finally come to rest on a group of spurred and booted young men occupying a center section of seats.

"Any of you lads think you can turn the trick?" he challenged, shaking a handful of bills in their direction.

The taunt was productive of immediate results. Leaving their seats, several of the group vaulted into the arena and amid a torrent of cheers gathered around the showman. Presently Mike again addressed the audience:

"Ladees and gentlemen," he cried, "the first rider of the evening will be Mr. Manuel Ortiz from Tecalote. He is willing to wager that he can stick Red Dynamite a full minute without grabbing leather, and I'm covering his money. After Mr. Ortiz has concluded his ride, others will follow. Meantime, I will ask your patience until the pony is saddled."

While this was taking place a combination stakeholder, judge, and timekeeper agreeable to both parties was selected, and when preparations were complete, the rider swung aboard and the show was on.

It proved an unlucky evening for Mr. Ortiz. Red Dynamite was a trained arena performer, which means that he had been educated to pitch with the force of a pile driver, the rapidity of a

pinwheel, and as erratically as a lopsided whirligig. The rider never had a ghost of a show. Four times, as fast as a watch ticks, the sorrel broke in two. At his fourth jump Manuel made one vain grab for the pummel and, missing, described a parabolic arc over the pony's head and onto the ground.

In the flickering light I saw old Farobank's eyes snap with appreciation. "Yonder pony knows his business," he announced in my ear. "He'll ditch those hombres one after another as fast as they crawl aboard."

And that is exactly what occurred. In quick succession three other riders met the same fate as the first. Then Mesquite Mike proceeded to vary the program.

"Folks," he announced, taking the center of the arena, "now that the little red hoss has done his part, we will switch to the second half of the entertainment. Waiting in the horse tent are several broncs which the owners offer to bet cannot be ridden. I will cover their money, the contests to be held under the same rules as those just finished. The first horse is owned by Mr. Juan Abeyta, and as the first rider I will name Pendleton Phil. We will now proceed."

The pony, a bulky, mountain-bred animal with a jug head and a rat tail, was led blindfolded into the ring. After he was saddled, Pendleton Phil climbed aboard, the blindfold was removed, and the show was on again.

The contest proved rather tame. Confused by the lights and crowd the Abeyta horse evinced a desire to sulk rather than pitch, so he was quickly taken out and another substituted. This one and yet another were cleverly ridden by Pendleton Phil. Immediately following, Pecos Pete rode two others. None of the four proved particularly difficult, and the audience began to show signs of boredom.

But when the piebald mare to which Farobank had called my attention earlier in the evening was next led in, interest perked up. She bore all the earmarks of a spoiled horse, and it immediately became apparent that her reputation as a bad actor was widespread. For when Mesquite Mike, with an eye to further enrichment of his exchequer, offered to cover any added money, his challenge met with instantaneous response from among the audience. Then when The Texas Kid came dragging his saddle into the arena, looking frail, and slight, and out of place, the showman was fairly swamped with bets.

Something about The Texas Kid's face pricked at my memory as he strode forward, but try as I might, I could not definitely place him. So, a little out of patience with myself, I edged along the aisle to where Pecos Pete stood leaning against the canvas.

"Who is that lad?" I asked him. "His real name, I mean. I'm morally certain I've seen him somewhere."

"I wouldn't wonder," Pete replied. "That's nobody else but 'Little Anse' Thornton."

I had it now. I'd seen his face in the newspapers! Only a few months previous his picture had headlined every daily in Texas, thanks largely to his father.

Anse Thornton, Sr., was an ex-cowboy, who, quitting the range for other lines, had fought his way into the millionaire class. Strange to say, the moment he hung up his saddle he washed his hands completely of anything pertaining to ranch life. As he grew older, he resented any reference to his younger days. He preferred to be known as a banker, and builder, and man of large affairs, as indeed he was. And from the day his son was born it was his fixed idea for him to follow his footsteps. But here nature interfered.

Little Anse was a frail child, and in the hope of building him up, the doctors prescribed outdoor life. So he was

placed under the charge of a tutor, and until he was nearly grown spent the major portion of each year on a ranch. When the time came for him to enter college, he expressed a desire to take up stock-raising instead. This annoyed Thornton senior.

"Your place is behind a desk, not in a saddle," he bluntly declared, and ordered his son off to college.

Little Anse obeyed, but he retaliated by spending his vacations working as a common cowhand. In many ways he was like his father. He possessed the same indomitable courage, the same bulldog tenacity of purpose, and the same stubborn way of clinging steadfastly to any preconceived notion that he might have.

As long as his son went no further, Thornton senior did nothing but boil and fume within the family circle. But when in the previous spring Little Anse, on a dare from a classmate, entered the Fort Worth rodeo, Anse senior's rage overcame discretion. He publicly stated that he would rather see his son in a wheel chair for life than an associate of a lot of ham-and-egg rodeo performers. It made wonderful newspaper copy.

Little Anse's retort was a hair-raising ride which, owing to a broken girth, put him in a hospital for three weeks. More newspaper copy. Then, when immediately upon his discharge he married his nurse, the headlines fairly screamed. Within a few days this gave way to deadly silence, engineered, no doubt, by a father grown tired of such publicity.

"Where's Little Anse's wife?" I inquired, recalling these incidents. "Is she with the show also?"

"No," replied Pete, "she's quit him cold. Seems a couple of old Thornton's lawyers got hold of her, and the Kid's never seen her since. She left a note saying she would never stand between him and his prospects, and evaporated."

"Likely they bought her out," I surmised.

"I doubt it," Pete objected. "To my mind it was a clear case of too much conscience. When they were married she thought Little Anse was just a busted-up cowhand, and he never told her any different. I reckon old Thornton's lawyers persuaded her that if she stuck to Anse his father would cut him off, and she cared enough about him to leave."

"Well, it's too bad," I commented.

"Sure is," Pecos Pete agreed fervently. "It's made a bum outa the Kid all right. Right after that he busted clean with his father and joined up with this outfit. If you ask me, he's tryin' to get himself killed. He turns down the soft rides and picks the hardest broncs brought on the lot. Wait till you see the chances he takes."

By this time the mare had been saddled and stood quivering under the blindfold. Presently, Little Anse climbed aboard; the judge waved for the blindfold to be removed, and the show was on.

It proved a worthwhile exhibition. In every way the mare measured up to her reputation. She crow-hopped, buck-jumped, and sunfished; going up like a sky rocket and landing like a ton of brick. But never for an instant was the Kid in trouble. He rode with the grace and assured ease of a born horseman. A half dozen times in as many successive jumps he raked the mare's shoulders in true contest style, then, dropping the reins, extended his arms above his head and took it as it came.

So fascinated was the judge by this grand-stand finish, that he utterly forgot to call time until the mare, after pitching herself out, quit stone-cold. It was a sincere if unconscious tribute to a daring ride. But the reaction of the crowd proved even greater.

"Bravo! Bravo! Mucho grande caballero!" Even those who had bet

on the mare disregarded their losses in face of the superb exhibition. Spanish plaudits split the night, Spanish throats yelled themselves hoarse, while from every hand a shower of hats descended into the arena.

It is curious how a racial custom brought by pioneers into another country will in time become an accepted usage among their descendants. Well as I knew this, I failed to understand the shower of hats until some one behind me remarked: "Much dinero weel thee rider collect when all thee headgear ees redeemed." Then I recalled that Mora is a veritable stronghold of Spanish customs and that in order to regain his hat, the owner must tender a piece of silver.

Upon dismounting, Little Anse stood in some perplexity gazing at the hats. Such behavior on the part of an audience was a new wrinkle to him. Then some one called helpfully: "Pick 'em up, caballero! Make 'em shower down plenty to get 'em back!"

Even then Little Anse failed to understand, or else some sense of pride restrained him from following the hint. In any event, he shrugged and started for the horse tent.

Upon occasion it takes but little to change the temper of a crowd. A moment before he had the entire audience with him. But now as he turned indifferently away, they misinterpreted the act as a studied insult and burst into a howl of disapproval. Floods of Spanish imprecations were hurled at him from every quarter.

Meantime, Mesquite Mike, who had been busy collecting his winnings, advanced on Little Anse, his face purpling with rage.

"You tow-headed young fool!" he shouted. "You addled-brained dummy! Do you want to gum the show? Pick up those hats and get ready to collect! If you don't want the money, I do."

The showman's approach was wrong. Trying to bulldoze Little Anse was like waving a red rag at a bull. In turn, his Thornton temper blazed.

"Pick 'em up yourself then!" he retorted, and started away.

Mike grabbed him by the shoulder and whirled him about. "You may have been papa's boy once," he snarled, "but you're only a ham-and-egg rider now. Gather up these hats or pack your saddle. This show don't need you to run."

Little Anse shook off the showman's hand. "Fair enough," he said. "My back wages to date amount to a hundred dollars."

"Try and collect!" taunted Mike.

Little Anse Thornton had clear gray eyes, gunman's eyes. Now they became like bits of ice. It would have given me no surprise had he reached for a pistol. However, he only laughed.

"One way is as good as another, Mike," he said easily. "I can ride any horse in your string backward and blindfolded. So I'll stick around a while. You get me, I guess."

The rodeo owner's face fairly blazed with wrath as the threat sank home. He knew that thereafter, from out of the audience, Little Anse meant to accept his nightly challenge to ride Red Dynamite. This in time would lead to his own financial embarrassment and to the dissolution of the show.

"I'll locate a horse that will fix your clock. if it takes every dollar I've got," Mike snarled.

"You'll need to if you keep running," Anse shot back.

By this time the arena was filled with people, some seeking their hats, others striving to push their way within earshot of the quarrel. In the shuffle I became separated from old Farobank and did not see him again until the next morning.

"How'd last night's show suit you?" I asked then.

"Bang up," he answered. "But it

wasn't a patch on what will come off to-night. The Kid's cocked and primed to ride the outfit out of business."

"Looks like Mike's up against it," I agreed. "He can't afford to bar the Kid's entry, for that'll kill interest. His only salvation is to make good his threat and find a horse that the Kid can't ride, which I doubt if he can do in a hurry."

"Well, that's where yo're wrong," declared Farobank impressively. "He's already located one. A stallion, and a sure-enough man-killer."

"Rats!" I scoffed. "In so short a time?"

"'S a fact," confirmed Farobank. "I just now heard about it. The stallion was owned by a hoss-breeder named Sandoval down near Vegas. A couple of months ago Sandoval died and left everything to his niece. She's been away somewhere, but lately she come back and is offering the stock for sale."

"How did Mike get wise to this horse?" I asked.

"Search me," shrugged Farobank. "Anyway, he talked with the girl early this morning over the phone and she promised to bring the stallion right up. If he's half as bad as he's claimed to be, we're due to see some fun."

"Possibly," I assented, and thought no more of the matter until about four o'clock that afternoon when a girl came into the hotel office where I sat with Farobank.

She was a slight thing, dressed in riding clothes, and would have been a raving beauty anywhere. Her type was distinctly Castilian. She had wavy black hair, large dark eyes, and her skin made one think of roses and cream.

Upon entering, she walked directly across to Farobank. "I am Adelina Sandoval," she said, a trace of liquid Spanish slurring her speech, "and I would like to wait here for a man who weeshes to buy my horse. We put it in the corral behind the hotel."

"Sit down, miss," invited Farobank, jumping to his feet. "I reckon yo' mean Mesquite Mike. I'll send word yo're here."

"Thank you, but Luz Armijo, who helped me bring the horse, has gone in search of heem," she explained.

"Well, make yoreself at home till they show up," Farobank said heartily.

Perhaps fifteen minutes passed before the showman appeared by way of the patio at the back of the office. He was accompanied by the Mexican, Luz, and apparently they had been making an inspection of the stallion.

This Luz was a swarthy, heavily mustached fellow who looked like a brigand, and about as trustworthy. He awkwardly introduced Mesquite Mike to Adelina.

The showman lost no time in coming to business. But he did not make an offer to buy the stallion. Very evidently he had in mind a cheaper method.

"I just looked at the stallion, miss," he said, "and while I wouldn't care to buy him, I'll rent him of you for, say two weeks."

Adelina appeared puzzled, and beckoning to Luz began a low conversation in Spanish. They were still talking when a man came in from the street and approached the desk.

He was about Farobank's age, of medium height, with iron-gray hair, gray eyes, and a square, pugnacious jaw. After sweeping the room with a glance, he rapped smartly on the register. Farobank, however, paid no heed. He was more interested in the forthcoming trade than he was in a possible guest.

Presently Adelina turned to the showman. "I theenk there has been some meestake," she said in a troubled voice. "I understood you weeshed to buy my horse."

"You must have heard wrong then," protested Mike, bent on saving the difference between the purchase price and two weeks' rent. "I'll tell you why I

want the stallion and you can judge for yourself."

Taking a position in front of the girl, he outlined his present difficulty, picturing himself as a person highly persecuted and painting Little Anse in the blackest imaginable colors.

"You see how it is, miss," he concluded. "All the use I got for a man-killer is just to fix this Kid so he can't ruin the show."

Adelina shook her head. "I would not care to rent heem, señor," she said.

Evidently, Mesquite Mike missed the horror-stricken look in her eyes. "All right then," he snapped, bringing forth a roll of bills. "If you want to be hard-boiled, I'll make an offer. Five hundred dollars, which is twice the hoss' value. Take it or leave it. Rather then pay more, I'll close up the show till the Kid gets tired and drifts away."

Without a moment's hesitation, Adelina waved the roll aside. "I do not care either to rent or sell my horse for such a purpose," she declared.

There was a finality in her tone which caused the showman to wince. Then the man standing at the desk unexpectedly spoke up.

"I would like to add five hundred dollars to this offer," he began, drawing several yellow-backed bills from a wallet. "That makes a thousand dollars all told."

Mesquite Mike's jaw dropped in sheer surprise. Plainly he had no idea what prompted the offer. He turned to speak, but Adelina forestalled him.

"What concern ees thees of yours?" she asked directly.

The stranger's face hardened. "Plenty," he snapped. "As it happens, Little Anse Thornton is my son."

Perhaps because I had unconsciously associated the square-jawed, determined face of the speaker with numerous pictures I had seen, the announcement caused me no surprise.

But Adelina started. "Do you weesh to see thees *muy grande caballero* who ees your son crippled or perhaps keeled?" she demanded, her gaze traveling scornfully over Thornton senior.

"Five hundred more," he said, adding another bill.

"You do not answer my question," Adelina stormed, ignoring the offer.

Thereupon, Thornton senior in turn lost his temper. "Listen, young lady," he rumbled, shaking a forefinger in her direction, "I fail to see where it's any of your business. However, as long as you insist on prying into family affairs, I'll tell you this much. I came up here to try and persuade my son to forgive and forget. But a while ago he turned me down cold and said some harsh things in addition. Personally, I'd rather see him in a wheel chair than living his present life. Ever since I forbade his entering the cattle business, he's caused me nothing but trouble, even going so far as to marry a fly-by-night nurse without my knowledge or consent. I have come to believe that a serious crippling is the only thing that will make him see the error of his ways. So if you own a horse that can turn the trick, just name your price."

Adelina's eyes had taken on a somber look as Thornton senior catalogued his grievances. "Thees nurse, hees wife," she murmured, "was she what you would call a money-seeking girl, señor?"

"How do I know?" Thornton snapped. "My lawyers attended to getting rid of her. And when my son comes to his senses, they'll attend to untangling the alliance. Now, how about selling that horse?"

For a space Adelina remained quiet. Her lack of movement and her colorless face made her resemble a figure molded from wax. Then she suddenly became animated, and her cheeks flooded with color.

"I theenk you are a very meddlesome old man," she said bluntly. "An' also I theenk your son is mos' unfortunate in

having you for a father. Me, I shall pray to the Virgin to bless him and punish you. Adios!" Thereupon she turned her back directly on the open-mouthed banker and left the office.

Plain curiosity impelled me to turn to see Thornton's reaction. Where I expected to encounter balked rage and chagrin, I found only sheer admiration. "What a girl! What a girl!" he was murmuring. "Turned down more money than she ever saw before in her life, just as a matter of principle. Why couldn't Little Anse have married a girl like that?"

By this time Farobank had taken his place behind the desk, so I strolled outside. Perhaps an hour later it came into my mind to see the stallion that had been the mainspring of the recent difficulty. Instead of going through the hotel, I went around it.

The corral, which is fully as ancient as the hotel itself, is inclosed by an eight-foot adobe wall and is entered by means of a solid plank door. At the outer edge of this door is an aperture through which one reaches an arm to remove an inside bar. Hearing voices within, I glanced through this hole and decided that, after all, I had no business there. For, grouped about the hobbled, blindfolded horse, Mesquite Mike, Thornton senior, Luz, and old Farobank were holding low-voiced conversation.

I did not see any of the four again until I encountered Farobank outside the hotel after supper. It was growing dark and people were streaming into the plaza behind Balanda's store. For the second night the rodeo bade fair to be well patronized.

"Goin'?" asked Farobank.

"I think not," I told him. "In fact, I doubt if there'll be any show, provided Little Anse is among the audience. Mike loves a dollar too well to throw one away by betting on his own horses against the Kid."

"Oh, come on! Yo're liable to see something you don't expect," Farobank urged, taking me by the arm.

As on the previous night every seat was occupied, so we were forced to stand in one aisle. A noticeable tenseness seemed to hold the entire audience in its grip, and Little Anse, who stood near the entrance, his saddle at his feet, was the magnet for all eyes.

At length the hour of opening arrived and Mesquite Mike, jingling in his silver finery, strode to the center of the arena. After making his usual ballyhoo about his readiness to wager on the ability of the forthcoming horse to throw any rider in the audience, he held up his hands to quiet the ensuing cheers.

"Ladees and gentlemen," he at length continued, "to-night I am going to vary my offer somewhat. If any one volunteers to ride the horse which will presently appear, I will bet him two to one he cannot stay aboard until the horse quits."

Hardly was the challenge uttered when Little Anse swung his saddle into the arena and vaulted the protecting strip of canvas. He had a small sheaf of bills in one hand.

"I'll take twenty dollars at two to one," I heard him say. "Now, bring on your ringer."

Mike bowed with burlesque exaggeration and waved toward the tent in the rear. At his signal Pendleton Phil and Pecos Pete rode into the arena. Between them, snubbed so tightly to a saddle horn that he was helpless, they led a blindfolded horse. Little of the animal could be seen as they came onward, but when they reached the middle of the arena Pecos Pete cut loose. A woman screamed shrilly from somewhere at my right, and I recognized the led horse as the Sandoval stallion. Coupling this knowledge with the scream, I put two and two together. Angrily I turned to my companion.

"You're mixed up in this," I accused.

"That stallion could never have been taken from the corral without your knowledge and consent. What did Mike and old Thornton do, buy both you and Luz?"

"By grab and seven hundred dollars!" Farobank blustered weakly, "yo' know I never sold out in my life. But a favor's a different matter. Yo' mighty near got to repay one when yo' get the chance. Besides, I got money that says the Kid can ride that hoss, ride him to a plumb standstill." Crowding forward, he pulled a wallet from his pocket and shouted at Mesquite Mike.

I now turned my attention to the stallion. He was a magnificent, coal-black animal with four white feet and a blazed face. Ham-flanked, powerfully muscled, boiler-bodied, it was easy to perceive that he possessed strength and endurance equal to that of two ordinary horses. Also it was equally plain that he was a killer. His every action cried this fact aloud. For, blindfolded and snubbed tight to a saddle horn, he gave continuous battle with teeth and hoofs.

Save for old Farobank and Little Anse himself, no one else offered to bet. In fact, many in the audience were against the ride for there were numerous shouted protests while the saddle was being adjusted.

I searched the rows of seats for Thornton senior but failed to discover him. However, I was as certain as could be that hidden somewhere in the audience this cold-blooded man was hoping and waiting for an accident that would unfit his son for further riding.

When my eyes returned to the ring the horse was saddled and Little Anse was climbing aboard. After he was firmly seated, Pendleton Phil tore loose the blindfold, cast off the stallion, and the ride was on.

What a contest it proved! A horse, a man-killer, whose mad frenzy was only equaled by the courage and determination of the rider on his back. *Pound! Pound! Pound! Jump! Jump!* Jump! The stallion, either through ignorance or pinning his faith on his own great strength, resorted to straight pitching. His efforts were breath-taking to behold. Bunching himself into a knot of muscle, he would go high into the air to land with the jarring force of a mighty hammer.

At first the crowd maintained a hushed and breathless silence—the silence of those dreading yet awaiting the worst. Then as it became apparent that the rider was holding his own, they began to voice encouragement. The contest was unexpectedly long. Had this not been a finish fight, Little Anse would long since have been the winner.

Pound! Pound! Pound! Jar! Jar! Jar! It was inconceivable that a man could actually stand such lengthy punishment.

Then, possibly because he felt the stallion weakening, or perhaps through sheer bravado in the presence of his father, Little Anse dropped the hackamore reins and raised his hands high above his head.

With the act, the stallion seemed to take on a new lease of strength. Squealing like a calliope gone mad, he redoubled his efforts, pounding up and down as steadily as a trip hammer. The fight was now a test of endurance between man and beast, with the crowd all for the man.

"Bravo! Bravo! Much grande caballero!"

I stood wondering how Thornton senior, wherever he was, liked that, when from behind me came the answer.

"Stay with him, son! Stay with him!" came a new roar of encouragement. "That's the old Thornton backbone! You got him whipped, son, whipped to a frazzle!"

Truly the ties of parenthood are strong and blood is thicker than water. Thornton senior had capitulated.

Little Anse must have heard and rec-

ognized the voice, for his tight-drawn lips widened in a caricature of a smile and he weakly waved one hand.

Presently it became apparent that the contest was nearing its end. His strength spent, the stallion was merely making spasmodic little hops, grunting at each attempt. Finally, like the slow stopping of a dying pendulum, his efforts ceased, and he stood stock-still, with hanging head.

A good thing too, for Little Anse's head was also bowed, his face was ashen, and crimson was trickling from his nostrils. He was out, entirely out, unconscious in the saddle.

The audience was cheering madly and from behind me Thornton senior kept bellowing: "Pick him out! Pick him out of that saddle, somebody!"

When the cry reached Pendleton Phil, who had been sitting his horse on the opposite side of the arena throughout the entire ride, he spurred forward. Either the thud of hoofs or the sight of the approaching horseman alarmed the stallion, for he lunged forward a single step.

The spring had gone out of Little Anse's body. He swayed backward, his feet left the stirrups, and like a half-filled bag of meal, he slumped to the ground.

Freed of the rider's weight, the stallion took on a new lease of life. A short run carried him to the farther end of the arena. Here he whirled, with his ears laid flat as a cat's, his teeth bared, the picture of a man-killer. Pendleton Phil rode cautiously forward, meantime unloosing his rope. When he was yet some distance away, the stallion charged with a savage onslaught. To avoid collision, the rider veered, and the raging beast rushed straight on toward the recumbent figure.

A moment before, as Little Anse slid lifelessly to the ground, a woman had again screamed at my right. A sudden commotion followed, and just as the stallion charged, Adelina Sandoval ducked under the canvas strip and ignoring the oncoming horse sped straight for the fallen rider. Bedlam ensued in face of the impending double tragedy.

Five steps away the crazed stallion halted, bunched his feet and, squealing viciously, prepared to pounce as a cat might pounce on a mouse.

Then from directly behind me, like thunder from a clear sky, came the roar of a .45. The stallion reared straight up, then toppled sideways, stone dead.

Before I could recover from my surprise, Thornton senior pushed past, a pistol in his left hand. Climbing into the arena, he strode to where Adelina sat with Little Anse's head gathered in her arms. She looked up as he approached, her fine eyes filled with scorn.

"Go away," she said distinctly. "Thees ees my husban', an' I weel never leave heem again for you nor any one else. No, never!"

Thornton senior grinned down on her. "That's the talk, daughter!" he said. "We can't either of us afford to turn down a lad like him."

In his left hand he still held a .45, and upon observing this, my wits began to function. I hustled after Farobank, who had climbed into the arena to collect his winnings.

"A while ago," I began, grabbing him by the arm, "you as good as admitted turning that stallion loose to repay a favor. Do you mean to say that old man Thornton——"

"Sure!" interrupted Farobank, grinning. "He's the original Texas Kid that saved my life in Dodge."

A Relic of the Old West

By Daston Balliet

OVER the door of the Alps Café, on the outskirts of the great old silver camp of Tonopah, Nevada, hangs an ox yoke of interesting history. It was found by a prospector while working through the Skull Mountain Range in southern Nye County. In the foothills near the east end of the range is Kane Springs, but every wash and gulch in the Skull Range is dry.

The yoke is made from the trunk of a scrubby nut pine, or piñon pine. It is handmade, evidently was made with a draw knife and ax, and is beautifully ironed by a blacksmith who must have been well skilled in his trade. Two rings, which have been well worn, hang from the clevis. Hence, the yoke must have traveled many a weary mile of desert sand.

It was fashioned some time prior to 1846 by the Mormons of Utah. That it was made in Utah or Nevada is evidenced by the fact that it is of nut pine, a wood not found east of the Rocky Mountains.

There was a stone deeply chiseled with the date "1846" near the place where the prospector found the yoke. Likewise, there are the ruins of a stone cabin near an old mine shaft started by the Mormons in 1846 on a rich silver vein some twelve miles away.

On one of the stones that formed the hearth of this old cabin is chiseled, "Bovar, 1846." Whether the cabin was built before or after the caravan passed is not known, as one of the passing argonauts may have chiseled the name while making a dry camp before getting lost in the blind canyon of the Skull Mountain. Evidently the travelers were about out of water and turned up this dry wash in the hope of finding it, or of being able to cross the range and plod on southward toward Gold Springs and Pah-rump Valley. "Pah," in the language of the Nevada Indians, means "water."

In searching for the history of the ox yoke, it has been learned that in 1845 a caravan of twenty-two wagons, drawn by from six to eight oxen, started from Utah to follow a line of springs, of which the Indians told, into the region near San Bernardino, California. The caravan was never heard of again; neither did it reach the Mormon settlements in California. It is supposed that after leaving the Pah-ranagat—plenty water—Valley, Hiko and Alamo, Nevada, the pioneers trekked across the desert to Yucca Pass without water, headed for Kane Springs. They missed the latter by sixteen miles. Frantic for water, they knew they could not go around the Skull Mountains, so they turned up a dry gulch in a desperate and futile attempt to cross the range. Had they been able to cross it they would only have encountered another stretch of sand drier and hotter than

that they had already traversed, but this they never knew, for they perished in the isolated, seldom seen, dry canyon of Skull Mountain.

About 1858, Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston, commanding the United States troops at Salt Lake City, sent three scouts to explore the country down to the Colorado River. The scouts found no trace of the caravan. And until the prospector found the old yoke and relics in the inaccessible vastness of the desert mountain range, the fate of the lost caravan was unknown for eighty-three years. As the Indians were very few and friendly, there is no reason to suppose that anything, except thirst, caused the party to perish.

In Next Week's Issue of

WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

THE SILVER BUCKAROO

By Frank Richardson Pierce

A rip-snortin', ring-tailed, two-fisted, fightin' curly wolf—that was what "Panther-spit" Cotter had been as a young man. His son's nickname was "Adonis," and it was a name that Cotter senior didn't like!

FLYING HEELS

By E. C. Lincoln

The happy cowboy threw his gear on his best pony and started north for Montana. The farther he went, the better he liked it.

CHIPS AND CHAPS

By George Cory Franklin

Long days among the wild things he loved; work on his claim on the grassy hillside above. Things looked good to this woodsman—for a moment.

Also Features by

George Owen Baxter
George Gilbert
Howard E. Morgan
And Others

15c a Copy

At All News Stands

The Face on the Bunk-house Wall

By Cherry Wilson

Author of "Stormy Dorn," etc.

ONE memorable night, two years ago, the big, sad-eyed buckaroo, "Hush-aby," had appeared at Triangle Z Ranch, in the Grande Ronde Basin of Arizona. Humbly he had begged for milk for the month-old orphan boy in his arms—bequeathed to him, as he explained, by a dying pal. And he had been given not only the milk, but a job as well. From that night, Triangle Z cowboys led exemplary lives.

Cheerfully they had amended their wild ways, that they might set an example for the baby who ruled the bunk house. Such pastimes as poker were banned. To curse in the hearing of little Pard was a cardinal sin. And a waddy who so far forgot himself as to come home at an unearthly hour singing "Sweet Adeline," had been treated as a pariah for weeks, and almost died of shame.

For every man had for the orphan a fiercely paternal feeling. And each of them would have fought his weight in wild cats for him. The only time they backslid in a bad way was when they imagined some affront to him. And it was for his sake that they committed that terrible piece of vandalism.

For the cowboys had no quarrel with art. They liked it, in fact, though, hitherto, their acquaintance with it had been short. Calendars, almanacs, snapshots, and infrequent post cards from rambling waddies who were having a fine time and wished they were there had entirely satisfied the æsthetic side of their nature, and embraced their idea of things artistic. At bitter cost they

learned how much higher art was—in more ways than one!

It all began the day Hushaby and "Wishful" Dixon were hunting strays over in the Painted Rocks Range, fifteen miles from the home ranch. And as they were hazing back a few Triangle Z Herefords it had dawned on Wishful all of a sudden, how wonderful this country was, with the buttes all rearing up straight, and all whittled out like elephants, castles, ships—most any old shape, each one a different color—red, blue, or yellow—but all so bright that they plumb dazzled a fellow.

"Gee!" soulfully sighed the dark, gawky cowboy, turning back a heifer likewise enamored of the Painted Rocks country, "ain't nature grand. Hushaby?"

Absently the big buckaroo, herding beside him, acquiesced: "Yeah."

"Yeah," sighed Wishful again, unutterable thoughts rising in him, "it's sure grand! Makes a hombre feel—well, plumb useless an' small. Like a man ain't no more'n a worm. It—it gives him feelin's, if you know what I mean."

Hushaby said that he did, but added impatiently, as he made a cow hurry: "But ol' Triangle Z will sure look a heap grander to me!"

Hushaby was always like that—on needles and pins when he had to be away from little Pard. The grand place to him was with the bunk-house baby Wishful understood, for he was almost as bad. Still he felt a shock that any one should mention the prairie ranch in the same breath with the Painted Rocks.

"Folks what's been everywhere," he reminded his partner, "say this place beats the world for scenery. They say Nature spilt all her paint here. An' she sure must have, or artists wouldn't flock here from everywhere. You know there's a whole colony of 'em over at Chaos. Ever bump into a artist, Hushaby?"

"Not that I knowed of," said the buckaroo sociably, prodding the procession toward a pink elephant butte.

"Nor me," admitted Wishful regretfully. "Queer birds, they say. Don't mingle none with the common herd. But jist browse around these rocks, slingin' paint for all they're worth. Funny we ain't run onto—Hai-ai-e-e!"

For the wild heifer in the lead suddenly stopped and threw up her head with a snort, her offended eyes fixed on something around the butte, beyond their vision—something that aroused every bit of bovine belligerence. For her head came down, her tail went up, her feet pawed dust, and before either puncher could investigate the cause of her ire, she charged into battle.

Wishful, spurring his buckskin after her, was startled to hear piercing yells ahead somewhere, and rounded the butte to see an outlandish figure making tracks for a dwarfed juniper tree, and the white-faced heifer tossing high something that was impaled on her horns and that seemed a blend of all the hues Nature had spilled here as it flashed in the sun!

But, whatever it was, the berserk cow had ground it into the dust before Wishful could gallop alongside and send her tearing off for the rest of the herd, stampeded by the ruckus she had kicked up. And he was about to identify it as a painting—only by its proximity to an overturned easel and the vermilion-smeared splinters of what had been a palette—when agonized moans from on high cut short his survey.

Looking up, he beheld the figure he had seen running perched in the juniper, one hand sustaining him there, while the other tore his long, black hair. A frail, sallow-faced, wild-eyed little fellow—an artist! For not only was his hair long, as Wishful believed an artist's should be, but his tie flowed, too, all over his chest, and over his attire he wore a queer, blue rig that looked like a dress, but which Wishful had heard

classified as a smock—a garment as symbolical of the artist's calling as chaps were of his.

Greatly awed, he got off his horse and assisted the painter out of the tree, apologizing as best he could for his cow. The apology passed unheard, for the distraught artist dashed right past him, and fell with a heart-broken wail on the ruined canvas. And though it jarred on Wishful to see a man cry over a paint job, he was moved to sympathy.

"Jiminy!" he overcame his awe to say consolingly. "Ain't that too bad!"

To his dismay this only heightened the little man's frenzy. For his tiny, black mustache worked, his beady, black eyes shot sparks, and he wailed in a higher voice, thrusting the mangled blob under the cowboy's nose:

"To bad! Too bad that a beast ruined my masterpiece! Bad—good heavens, it's a calamity! Weep, young man! Weep for me, for yourself, for the world that knows not its loss!"

Though not sufficiently touched to weep over it, Wishful did feel the same sense of impoverishment he had felt once when he had made a bad mistake on the ranch and the boss had docked him the five-dollar raise he didn't know he was going to get. Bending concerned eyes on the mess, "Was it the pink butte?" he asked.

The artist's scornful glance withered him. "It was," coldly the genius explained, and never had Wishful felt so dumb—"what lay behind the eye that beheld the butte, An idea—art! The shadow of divine perfection. An illusion on the ground of truth!"

Always afterward, Wishful reproached himself for not having been warned. For not having run then and there. Instead, in his blissful ignorance, he sat down on a rock and—seeing that Hushaby had the herd in hand, and was continuing down the trail—lent a highly interested ear to the painter's dolorous lamentations.

"A cow kicked over a lantern and burned Chicago!" An item of absorbing interest to Wishful. "Was anything destroyed that could not be replaced? Did it matter? A cow ruins my masterpiece, and unborn generations will suffer. Because," the artist announced, in portentous tone, "I am the maestro!"

There was a lot more, and Wishful stayed to hear it all—for it wasn't every day that a puncher had a chance to hobnob with a painter. And when finally he broke away, he had to gallop like sixty to overtake Hushaby.

"A cow burned up Chicago!" was his dazed mutter, for he was still affected by breathing that rarefied air. "But our heifer plumb ruined things for folks not even born! He says he's hung his pictures all over Paris, France, an' New York! He's a artist, an' then some!"

"He's loco!" declared Hushaby, though he had but a far glimpse of the treed genius.

Stated Wishful, and his tone was portentous, also: "He's the maestro!"

"Are you dead sure, Wishful?" Hushaby twisted about in the saddle.

"Didn't he tell me? Didn't I set there an' chew the rag with him, like we was ol' tillicums?"

"Reckon he's a artist then," admitted the big buckaroo readily. "Fer I recollect seein' somethin' about him in last week's Gunsight *Gazette*. Somethin' about the maestro comin' to immortalize Arizony—though how a man kin make ol' Arizony more immortal 'n what——"

Right then the bee that was to sting Triangle Z got into the bonnet of Wishful Dixon!

"Let's git him to immortalize Pard!" he suggested excitedly. "While the maestro's here, let's git him to paint our baby for the bunk-house wall!"

Familiar as he was with the high flights of Wishful's fancy, this one took Hushaby's breath. But he put his foot down on it flat.

"Nothin' percolatin'! Paintin' run into

money. Likely you couldn't git that feller to touch a picture under twenty bucks. An' I kin think of a lotta things Pard needs worse. Shoes, fer instance. That pore leetle man's feet is about out to grass!"

And again Hushaby said appealingly, as they drove the retrieved strays within the limits of Triangle Z: "Now, fer Pete's sake, Wishful, don't git the boys all het up over that idee! I got my hands full as it is—rearin' a baby on punchers' wages, 'thout goin' in fer such hifalutin' things as painted pictures."

Wishful made no promises. But Hushaby was relieved when, at supper, he heard him telling the rest of the boys all about meeting the maestro, without any hint of his wild idea. That he hadn't forgotten it, Hushaby knew, for all evening he was brooding and thoughtful, as he always was when afflicted with a repressed desire. And the big puncher nervously noted how Wishful, pawing over the pile of old papers on the table, often cast on little Pard a speculative look, as if he might at any minute attach a wire and hook to the baby and hang him right up!

But in the fun of giving Pard his bedtime romp and bath—a ritual that normally required the entire crew of Triangle Z—Hushaby forgot Wishful entirely. And surely it was a sight for the gods! That rough, tough, miscellaneous lot of waddies down on their knees in adoration of an innocent baby—though Pard, with his great, soulful black eyes, and happy laugh, was an appealing a tad as ever tangled himself in a man's heart.

"All-in" Lappin—a hard-looking old fellow, if ever there was one—bent his rheumatic back to rub down the sturdy, squirmy, pink cherub standing on a towel on Hushaby's lap. Then "Dimples" handed over the little white nightgown, which "Ca'lina" slipped over Pard's head. And Hushaby's big hands were struggling with the microscopic button in the back, when a shrill "Criminy gee!" made him fumble. He saw Wishful poised in the middle of the floor, staring at the week-old copy of the Gunsight *Gazette* which he had unearthed from somewhere.

"Gee, Hushaby," he exclaimed, as the boys swarmed about him, "you mustn't a'read all this piece about that artist! Why, he ain't only the maestro, but the biggest painter in the whole universe! There's colyums about him! Lissen!" And he read one headline. "The Maestro To Paint Local Scenes." Then he began another: "G. Wilkes Lynee, World's Foremost Artist——" but excitement got the better of him.

"Boys, we gotta git him to paint Pard! It's a crime not to—if he's as good as all that! G. Wilkes Lynne ain't apt to ever be in our neck of the woods again!"

Vociferously, as Hushaby had known they would, the boys agreed.

"Ma gosh, yes!" Old All-in contributed his nickel's worth. "Hushaby, we'd ought to git leetle Pard painted right off. He's most two now, an' we ain't got so much as a tintype of him. Purty soon he'll grow up, an' we'll fergit how he looked!"

A light, almost of motherly love dawned on Hushaby's homely face, bent over the drowsy baby, as slowly he said: "I won't ever fergit how Pard looked." Wishful put in. "He can't see hisself, like we see him. An' he won't ever see hisself like he is now, unless we git a baby picture of him. Some day he'll be a man, an' then he'll wish you'd got him one."

"True as gospel!" affirmed All-in, as one who knew. "Atter the years has wore an' tore a hombre, it's mighty fine to be able to see jist how you looked when you begun. Pussonally, I'd give a heap to have a picture of me, when I looked like him."

Though All-in was his ally, Wishful could not stand that slam on the baby,

and he said crushingly: "You never looked like him!"

"A lot you know!" bristled the old cowhand. "I was the spittin' image of him—allowin', of course, fer the natural difference in complexion an' general aspect."

"The difference," Wishful said heartlessly, "ain' natural!"

And Triangle Z howled at that sally. All but the gentle buckaroo, tucking little Pard in his bunk—for Hushaby was too tender-hearted to laugh at anyone.

"I did so," stoutly All-in defended his pristine beauty, "make a purty baby! As I've heered my ol' mammy say, many's the time. With long yella curls, an' big, saucer eyes, as blue as the butter crock in the spring-house. Why, she couldn't even take me to ride in my leetle gocart, 'thout a dozen wimmin stoppin' her to coo over me. But," he sighed regretfully, "I've changed."

"Sadly," was on Wishful's tongue, when he saw how Hushaby was affected by the poignant thought of bald, bow-legged, old All-in with yellow curls in a go-cart and he struck while the iron was hot.

"That jist goes to show," he clinched, "how handy baby pictures comes in. You see, Hushaby, how bad All-in needs one. We got to git Pard painted before he grows up to look like him!"

Requiring but a glance at the wizened old cowhand to be convinced of the grim necessity, Hushaby's protest was weak. "But Pard needs shoes, an'——"

"Reckon we can rustle the price among us," overruled Wishful. "We'll all chip in, an' we ain't pikers. Now the maestro said he'd be over there all this week—doin' over the butte which our cow hooked. Wadda you say we all ride over to-morrow—it's Sunday—an' git him to come here an' paint the baby?"

They all agreed emphatically. Hushaby making it unanimous by his silence.

"An' the picture will belong to us all!" finished the fervent cowboy. "We'll hang it up on the bunk-house wall. Right there, where Washington's crossin' the Delaware on the calendar!"

So they made their rash decision. Nor did sleeping on it abate their ardor one bit. Bright and early that sabbath morn, they left for the Painted Rock Range to engage the great man, taking little Pard with them. And often, as they loped, their proud eyes went to him, sitting up before Hushaby, his chubby fists holding tight to the cantle, as bright and clean in his blue gingham rompers as the sparkling sun on the chaparral.

"Ain't he a picture?" enthused Wishful.

"Too purty to last!" old All-in declared. "Lucky we're catchin' him in time. I hate to think of what mighta happened, Wishful, if you hadn't run acrost this here Geewhillikins feller!"

"Holy cow!" Wishful warned. "Git his name straight—it's G. Wilkes Lynne. You're apt to queer the whole deal, if you 'Geewhillikins' him!"

For, now, in the Painted Rocks, with the fantastic buttes rearing up and the grandeur of Nature getting in its humbling effect on them, a lot of the boys' assurance left them.

"The yahoo which makes the best mousetraps," worried All-in, reining around, "has got the world makin' trails to his door. This jasper kin afford to be choosey about his job. Mebbe he won't paint Pard!"

Only Hushaby could tranquilly face that thought. "Why wouldn't he? Pard's purtier 'n the Paint' Rocks!"

"Still," Wishful reminded him, "artists is queer."

But their fears were soon dispelled. For when they rode up to the maestro, busy at his easel before the pink elephant rock, and the overawed punchers were lined up before him, with little Pard held in a strategic position, and

Wishful—spokesman, by virture of previous acquaintance—made known the object of this visit, why, he actually jumped at the assignment! Thereby convincing Triangle Z, even more conclusively than the printed word, of his matchless ability.

"Such a subject!" he raved, staring at Pard, his diminutive mustache working—for all the world, All-in thought, like a jackrabbit's in an alfalfa patch. "Intriguing! Thrilling! A most unusual type. Latin——"

"Irish-Mex," corrected Hushaby proudly. "His mammy was a Mendoza an' his papy a Casey. They both died an' left me the ba——" He broke off, as the blue-smocked little painter clapped a hand to his brow.

"I see," he murmured, with mesmerized eyes on the baby, "racial conflict! The war of inheritances! Human strife! Just so shall I depict it. For posterity will I paint it! And it shall hang——"

"On the bunk-house wall!" stipulated Wishful hastily, afraid he would say over in Europe. "An' you're paintin' it for us, savvy? That's what we're payin' you for."

"Ah, yes!" In quite the traditional way, the artist had forgotten the detail now of paramount importance to Triangle Z. "You are paying me."

"How much?" inquired All-in, who was not bashful by a mile of fence posts.

The genius shrugged. "The remuneration is of small consequence." Then, as one who would be done with trifling matters, "Shall we say ten thousand dollars?" he inquired.

Of small consequence—ten thousand bucks!

"Gosh a'mighty, I should say not!" All-in gasped, the only one of them who had any breath left. "Now, see here, Geewhillikins, we ain't plutocrats, but punchers. We jist want one pitcher! An' fer ten bucks we kin git a whole dozen made with a camera!"

Whereat the artist bestowed on the bow-legged old cowhand the same withering glance of scorn that had burned up Wishful Dixon. "Gentlemen," he said, in a frosty voice, "you insult my art. My work is beyond price."

"Plumb outta sight!" agreed All-in, not even singed. "But you got to pull it right down to the ground, if you aim to do business with us."

With an air of dismissal, the artist dipped his brush in raw umber, and was turning to the easel, when his eyes fell again on the bunk-house baby, and stayed there gazing hypnotically, for long, awful moments, in which the boys seemed to see Pard aging by seconds, and for the first time noticed how his legs bowed like All-in's! In these moments, Wishful, who never gave up a desired thing until the last cat was hung, did some tall figuring. By pooling their wages, going stone broke for a month, even doing without smokes——

"If we throwed in your board," he pleaded—the artist's hungry appearance leading him to believe that might be quite an item—"could you do the job for a hundred an' eighty bucks?"

It was some drop. But the maestro must have suffered many such, and have become calloused, for there was no pain on his face as he looked up.

"Very well," he shrugged. "You shall have the painting for one hundred and eighty dollars."

And that sum really seemed of such small consequence after ten thousand that the boys—who had not been prepared to spend a tenth of it—galloped home with the feeling that they had made a bargain!

Next day, while they were at breakfast, the artist rode in from Chaos. And having selected the loft of the horse barn for his workshop, spread his paints out, and set the easel up, he was ready to start. But the boys could not decide in what clothes, or what pose, he should immortalize Pard.

All-in wanted him just as he came from the tub, as being more revealing of his unblemished condition, after he was a man and the years had got in their wear and tear on him, while Wishful was all for rushing into town, to see if he couldn't get a black velvet suit with lace frills on the cuffs and neck, like he had seen a little boy wear in a painting once. But Hushaby overruled that idea.

"Oncet I had my picture took," said the big buckaroo plaintively, "an' I rigged all up in a b'iled shirt an' a swaller-tail coat, with a white petunia, I recollect, in my buttonhole. An' I sure looked swell. But nobody knowed me from Adam's off ox, an' they'd ast me who my own picture was. We'll paint Pard as is—so he'll look natural."

"How would *you* paint him, Gee-whillikens?" All-in appealed to the highest authority.

"It's of no consequence," shrugged the maestro indifferently. "An artist sees what is behind the eye. Not the garments of flesh, but the soul of the subject."

In the end, Hushaby won the day, and they sat the toddler on a folded Navajo blanket, with Hushaby's saddle for a back rest, and gave him Hushaby's de-shelled six-gun, that had been his toothing ring and old plaything, and went off to work, leaving him with the maestro. And little Pard made an ideal subject, they were told, when at every possible opportunity, they sneaked in from the range to see how the painting was getting along.

"Famously," the artist informed them.

But they had to take his word for it. Not even Wishful was permitted a squint at the canvas.

"When the work is done," indignantly the painter informed them, "it will be unveiled with due formality."

And when they insisted, he got downright hostile about it, heaving a gob of blue lake at All-in, when he tried to horn in, and throwing so many tantrums that the boys were almost afraid to look at the barn.

"Artists is queer," stanchly Wishful defended him. "G. Wilkes Lynn is the biggest, so, natcherally, he'd be the queerest."

For the young waddy felt a curious kinship with the maestro. And a strange discontent stirred within him. He felt that life had cheated him—that cows were beneath him. And his fingers itched with a mighty urge to sling paint himself. It was not for lack of the price—for his credit would stand it—but from deliberate choice that he failed to get a hair-cut that Saturday night.

And, incessantly, at home and abroad, he talked of G. Wilkes Lynne, and what he was doing, until the whole Grande Ronde Basin was in a hubbub over the world-famous artist who was at Triangle Z, making a portrait of the bunk-house baby. The news even spread to Chaos, and there solved a mystery. For G. Wilkes Lynne had disappeared shortly after arriving there, and no one knew where to find him. Now the public discovered that he had a commission, and even those most eager to see him left him alone lest they disrupt his inspiration, and the world lose something priceless.

Pay day came on Wednesday, and Wishful duly collected the money. All six cowboys cheerfully turned over their thirty. And Wishful, not liking the responsibility of carrying all that cash around, turned it right over to the great man, who pocketed it with impressive nonchalance.

"Didn't even bother to count it!" complained All-in, who had a healthy respect for cash, particularly when he had worked for it himself. "Acted like it was dirt!"

"Which it is," Wishful moodily said, "alongside of art."

Stroke by stroke, the portrait progressed. And though the boys could not see it, they had seen the picture Pard

made sitting on his blanket, the personification of Patience, his big eyes grave, as if he wondered what it was all about. And that was etched on their minds. They could hardly wait to see what a picture Pard would make when a man like the maestro got through with him. It wouldn't be long now, for the finishing touches were being put in.

Then, on Sunday, while they were in the cook shack at dinner, the paint-speckled smock appeared there, and the little man in it—not so thin nor as wan, as when he had come, thanks to the cook's noble contributions to art—announced in weary, but satisfied tone, that the painting was done.

"Whoopee!" Wishful yelled, sliding out of his chair. "Come on! Let's go right up, boys! Gee, I can't wait!"

His casualness horrified the maestro into another outburst. Go right up? Heavens above! That was no way to approach art!

"Waal, how do we approach it?" All-in demanded.

"On your knees!" he was sternly advised. "The painting will be formally unveiled at five."

Impatient, but chastened, the boys dressed up, as though they were going to church, and with much the same feeling, at the hour appointed, ascended the barn loft. Not on their knees, of course, but with reverence in their rapt faces, as sitting on a beam they stared at the covered canvas. Impressively the maestro stood beside it, one hand on his chest, the other on the cover, his vivacious mustache twitching complacence.

Tensely they waited, their suspense communicating itself even to the baby, for his little chin quivered, and he snuggled to Hushaby. Then, with a dramatic flourish, the veil was whipped off.

And Triangle Z was all but knocked from the beam by the shock!

For the picture that met their astonished gaze was not Pard! It was not anything that they could make out—just a crazy mess of squares, triangles, and blocks, some dark, some light, and all shades between. Silently they stared, desperately trying to see something that was not there.

"You feel it," demanded the painter with triumph—surprised and pleased that even untrained eyes appreciated his effort—"the conflict of races, the soul struggle, the cross pull? You see it—the war of mixed inheritance?"

"What I see," said All-in, and his voice was slow and grim, "might be a battle ground or a lumber yard. But it sure ain't Pard, which you was hired to paint!"

There was a sputter and fizz, then the artist blew up. So! They expected a physical likeness from him— the maestro! They took him for a mere copyist!

"Form, color, anatomy," he told them shrilly, "mean nothing to me! I paint what is behind the eye. And this"—pointing a shaking finger at the canvas—"is my honest conception of the subject!"

A cold chill ran through him. He saw that row of punchers stiffen, saw their jaws set, and their hands twitch—twitch, it seemed to him, toward the gun at each hip. And he smelled the sulphur in the air, as, still they glared at—his conception of their baby!

For Pard's plump little arms were, in this fiend's eyes, straight and square, and three times as long as the rest of him. Two big blocks, were his dimpled hands. Two more his chubby feet. His big, black eyes were one ghastly green daub. And—crowning touch of outrage—there was an awful big, white block for a head!

With an unintelligible roar, hardly human, they fell, as one man, on the blasphemous canvas. They rent it, figuratively, limb from limb. And, not content with that, they bore the remains to the bunk house where, despite the

terrific heat of the late August afternoon, they built a fire in the stove, and fed the masterpiece bit by bit, to the flames, as though it had power to feel and they could prolong its sufferings. And when the last shred had fallen away in white ash, they looked around for the maestro.

But, in still more terror than he had run from their wild heifer, the maestro had fled!

"With our money!" wildly yelled some one. "He's got away with our hundred an' eighty bucks!"

"Keep on your shirt!" coldly All-in counseled. "We'll git it back. An' Geewhillikins kin thank his lucky stars if he gits off with that. Of all the low-down, coyote tricks!"

"Artists," Wishful's apologetic bleat was weak, "is queer, an'——"

"Yeah?" Sarcastically, All-in silenced him. "Waal, I've seen highway robbers queer the same way! Whoa-a, Hushaby!"

For the big buckaroo was heading for the corral with the insulted child, and a determined look on his face that said he was going somewhere. He did not give a rip about the money, he declared, indicating, perhaps, that he was artistic himself. But, he added, with dark menace, "No hombre livin' kin abuse this pore leetle orphan here and get away with it!"

Silent and grave, sombreros tilted at an ominous angle, the boys set off for Chaos at a pace that swiftly melted the miles. And, at the sun's red sinking, they marched through the picturesque clutter of adobe huts that made up the ancient town, and drew artists from far and near. For Chaos had not only the natural phenomena of the Painted Rocks, but the glamour of antiquity. The town was ancient when a wilderness brooded over the oldest American cities. And to it still clung like a subtle incense the mystery of ancient races, the romance of Spanish occupation, and the brooding atmosphere of abandonment.

But little recked Triangle Z for these. The waddies were after G. Wilkes Lynne. According to the newspaper account of him, he was just here on a trip, so would not have a permanent residence. And they sought him at the Yuba House—the one hotel that Chaos boasted of.

They found the lobby teeming with guests. And though none of the punchers could see a sign of the maestro, they saw many a man who looked enough like him to be his twin brother.

Curious eyes were fixed on the militant sextet, especially on the big buckaroo ahead, whose bearing promised trouble, despite the fact that he carried a baby. And many curiously drew near, as Hushaby stalked to the desk and coldly informed the overworked clerk:

"I'm huntin' G. Wilkes Lynne!"

Wearily the youth replied: "Tell me somethin' new!" before turning back to an important guest. "Nope, he ain't checked out yet. Yep, I'm sure—his baggage is still in Room Twenty-four."

And swinging back to Hushaby: "See that mob," he said, weakly waving at it, as he slumped down on the counter. "Folks from Vancouver, London, Hollywood, Paris, an' where not! Swooped down on us like a grasshopper plague. Clutterin' up the landscape till home artists complain they can't paint. An' every man jack of 'em is huntin' G. Wilkes Lynne!"

Amazed, Triangle Z gaped at their companions in misery—for they had no doubt that these men had babies of their own on whom the maestro had played his coyote trick.

"They act like I was to blame!" complained the fatigued hotel man. "Hound me to death! Think I—nope," he replied, hitching around to a clamoring pilgrim, "he ain't showed up yet—think I ought to produce him

outta my hat, like I was a wizard, an' he was a rabbit!"

"Where is he?" demanded Hushaby.

"Search me. I ain't seen him since the day after he registered here. But I've heard he was over to Triangle Z Ranch——"

"Not now, he ain't!" inserted old All-in.

Instantly the buzz about them subsided. And the clerk wanted to know if he was sure.

"Ab-so-lute-ly!" The old cowhand left no doubt in any mind. "We're the outfit which he was doin' the paint job fer!"

Then the mob overwhelmed them, firing a heavy barrage of questions. Was this the baby Lynne had painted? Where was Lynne? And this formed a full fifty per cent of the questions—could they see the painting?

But before the boys could rally to answer, a portly, sporty, self-assured individual stepped out, booming over the rest:

"My name's Jefferson Horn. And while I'm no artist myself, I'm a patron of art—and as important to art, I guess. For if it wasn't for men of capital to buy their stuff, artists would starve. Now, my good fellows, any work of G. Wilkes Lynne has me going. But what I can't understand, is how you—no offense meant—could afford to engage a man of his caliber?"

But the boys were offended just the same. They did not like Horn—the first of his type they had ever seen, though a type common enough in this day and age, when millionaires are made overnight. And Horn's wealth was so new it squeaked. Oil had been struck on his rocky farm in Texas, and flowing gold had rushed to his head. For lack of other employment, he dabbled in art. He pursued it as a hobby, the attendant publicity appeasing his vanity. But he could not tell Triangle Z what they could afford!

Old All-in retorted haughtily: "It didn't strain us much to git Geewhillikins to paint Pard!"

Wealthy cattlemen! Of course! There must be many in Arizona Horn's manner changed perceptibly, ceasing to patronize, becoming fraternal. "I'll bet it set you back enough," he hinted mildly. "Any work of Lynne's is worth—well, at a conservative estimate, ten thousand dollars."

Heartfelt was the groan that shook the lobby.

"Oh, gosh a'mighty," moaned All-in, collapsing against Wishful Dixon, "ten thousand bucks, an' we—ouch!" he broke off as Wishful gave him a swift and surreptitious kick in the shin.

Seeing only the cowhand's expression, Horn grinned understandingly. "So Lynne stung you?" he asked.

"Ten thousand," gasped the old man once more, "an' we—o-ouch!" Savagely, Wishful had kicked him again.

"Well," remarked the patron enjoyably, "it always hurts to get the worst of a deal. Do the other fellow before he can do you, is my motto! But when can I see this painting?"

The boys stared at each other in stark consternation.

"Not never!" wailed All-in. "Fer we——"

"Now," Horn struck in, just in time to spare All-in more pain, "I won't take no for an answer. I'll drive over to Triangle Z to-morrow afternoon about four."

Out on the sidewalks of Chaos, the fresh air revived the boys to full consciousness of the terrible thing they had done—destroyed an object worth more money than all of them together could ever hope to lay hands on. All-in, nursing his leg, before he mounted, took it out on Wishful Dixon.

"What was you tryin' to do in there," he demanded indignantly, "bust a leg fer me?"

"I was tryin' to shut your mouth!"

the boy snapped. "Now, keep it shut, while I try to think of some way out of this mess!"

"Waal," grimly All-in allowed, getting to horse, "you sure got fodder fer thought!"

And so had they all—with the priceless canvas gone beyond all hope of recall, and Jefferson Horn coming to see it to-morrow at four!

"If one peep of this ever gits out," Wishful said despairingly, as they solemnly wound home through the gloom, "we're sunk! If folks ever found out we was so dog-goned ignorant we burnt a paintin'——"

"Like it was dirt!" All-in moaned into his bandanna. "Jist chucked it in the fire, like——"

"Worth ten thousand dollars, we'd never hear the last of it! Think how the Lazy K"—Triangle Z's bitterest rivals—"would hoot at that!"

The boys squirmed at the thought.

"Besides," pointed out the morbid cowboy, "if the papers gits aholt of it, the whole world will know what boneheads we was!"

Out of the dusk, Hushaby spoke. "An' I thought he was abusin' Pard! I don't savvy that picture yet. But nothin' worth ten thousand bucks is any insult!"

Back in the bunk house, they sat up late, trying to think of a way out of the scrape. Could they say they had sold it? No—for Horn would insist on knowing the name of the buyer. Could they say it was stolen? If they did, Sheriff Jerry Paxton would be after the robber. And they had great respect for Jerry's ability to see through a knothole. Could they say the painting had burned accidentally. Not without burning the bunk house to make it plausible. The long, hard session of thought brought no results.

But in the small hours of that night, Wishful awakened the bunk house.

"I've got it!" he whispered wildly, but, careful not to disturb little Pard, curled up like a kitten there beside Hushaby.

Eagerly the boys reared up.

"I'm goin' to paint a copy of that picture myself," was his desperate plan, "an' hang it up, to show Horn when he comes!"

"You—paint!" hooted All-in, bitterly disappointed. "Why, you couldn't whitewash a hencoop! You got jist one qualification, Wishful—you're sure queer enough!"

"If I couldn't beat the maestro," retorted the flaming youth, "I'd go take a jump at myself!"

And the boys chirped up. For come to think of it he could not do worse!

"He's left his tools, an' some paint." The boy's eyes glowed in the gloom. "All I'll need is some canvas——"

"There's that ol' tent out back of the cook shack," Hushaby suggested. "You might rip a chunk outta that."

"Yeah, I thought of it. But it ain't stiff enough."

"Paste it over a board then," helped All-in.

The plot was laid—with no meaner motive than to have a painting of some kind to show Jefferson Horn, and save their own faces. And the first rays of the rising sun found Wishful installed in the loft of the horse barn, wildly happy, for all his worry, at this chance to express himself—no, not that exactly. For, though he was sure he could paint a portrait of Pard that would look a lot more like him than the one they had incinerated, he was wise enough not to. His job was to make a copy. But he was slinging paint at last, and he was happy.

Nor did he use little Pard for a model—but the maestro's conception of him. For that picture lived on in his mind—color and form, every detail complete. And he painted in a frenzy, since he must do in a few hours what had taken a practiced artist a week! The sun

mounted, the loft became torrid, Wishful profusely perspired—and painted.

About eleven o'clock, the paint gave out. And there was still the green blob of an eye to put in, and the white block head! Then ensued moments of frenzied rushing about the ranch, in which the boys' last hope seemed gone. But luckily some one unearthed a can that still had a little green paint in it—left over from trimming the wheels of the buckboard. And some one else discovered a little white kitchen enamel on a shelf in the cook house—which as far as Wishful could see, did just as well.

In fact, when the finishing touches were done, his painting looked just as good to him as the original one. And he felt sure, then, that it would deceive Jefferson Horn, who was not an artist, but just a patron—and so keep the range at large from ever discovering what fools they had been.

In the full flush of creation, Wishful called the boys up to see it. His heart palpitated with pride, as they joyfully declared they could hardly believe that it was not the maestro's!

"Or couldn't," amended old All-in, "if I hadn't helped burn up that ten thousand bucks. Horn won't know the difference. We'll keep it, Wishful."

"No, we won't!" Hushaby was determined on that. "It's a good picture, Wishful, fer what it is—whatever that is. But I don't want folks to think Pard ever looked like it!"

They set up the sticky mess behind the barn, to dry in the sun, then waited, with high confidence and much impatience, for the art patron. Wishful sighted the buckboard first, he saw Horn in it, and yelled, in a panic.

"Gosh, he's bringin' half the Yuba House with him! Some of them hombres is bound to be artists an' they'll git wise! For they know pictures, like we know cows! Take us, now—we can tell a sick cow a mile off, and tell what's wrong with it, while them tenderfeet would jist see a cow, an' let her go at that. But put the shoe on the other foot. Take them—Oh, Jiminy, what'll we do?"

"Git it in—quick!" hoarsely instructed All-in. "An' hang it up—in the dark! I'll hold 'em back!"

And while he ran to meet the buckboard, Wishful dashed out back for the picture, sneaked it in the rear door, and hung it on the darkest side of the bunk-house wall. Then he flung a blanket over it, gave the high sign, and the visitors were ushered in.

Silently they came, with hats off—for they knew how to approach art. And when they were all assembled, and Triangle Z shook in its boots, Wishful, with a do-or-die look, flickered the blanket off. There was a ghastly, prolonged pause, in which the boys seemed to hear their shame blazoned to the range, then—thrilling them, sweet music to Wishful—gushed forth the most extravagant encomiums.

"Elastic! Luminous! Forceful! A masterpiece! Such life! Such feeling!"

The cowboy, hating to have Lynne get all the credit, could scarcely contain himself.

"But when," inquired Horn, in a tone that made the boys sure that he did know what was wrong with the picture, "did Lynne forsake the old school? He's always been a confirmed naturalist. A foe to the modern in art. While this painting is ultra mo——"

"Heaven be thanked," praised a cubist, coming out of his trance, "that Lynne's seen the light at last!" And, darting forward, "Men, note his materials! Clever! New! Note this artistic treatment of canvas——"

"Hey, you, back up!" Wishful cried terrified. "It's my picture! An' you-all gotta keep hands off!"

Then the art patron laid hands on him. This painting, raved Jefferson Horn, was historic—Lynne's first, since he made his revolutionary change!

"Such a treasure," he pleaded nobly, "is not for the few, but for all humanity. It should be saved for posterity. As it would be, if it was acquired by a collector, by me. Will you," he almost wept, "part with it? Could I persuade you to sell it?"

"Could you!" sang out All-in, shutting up with a wince, as he intercepted a glance from Wishful that had a kick in it.

"We didn't aim to," said Wishful.

"But you will!" pressed Horn. "I won't take no for an answer. "The question is—how much?" And he reached for his pocketbook.

With unconscious mimicry of his famed understudy, Wishful shrugged indifferently. "A hundred an' eighty bucks," he said.

The patron almost dropped in his tracks. His mouth opened as though to protest, but snapped shut. His eyes glistened. What a tale to tell his colleagues—how, for a song, he had purchased a Lynne original from ignorant cattlemen!

"Done!" he exclaimed, hastily counting the sum into Wishful's hand.

So the first and last work of the cowboy artist, tenderly wrapped, and tended like something sacred, was borne away from Triangle Z.

"Why didn't you ast him ten thousand!" demanded All-in greedily.

"Because," Wishful said, "I ain't a highway robber. We paid a hundred an' eighty for Lynne's picture. Mine was as good as his. So Horn got his money's worth. An' we," doling out each waddy his thirty, "have got back our money."

"But we ain't got a baby pitcher of Pard," the old cowhand reminded them. "An' every day he gits older. You paint it, Wishful!"

Slowly, the cowboy shook his head. For his confidence faltered before the job of immortalizing the babyish charms of little Pard!

Nervous lest Horn discover the fraud and return for a refund, Wishful went to the door. The buckboard was rolling right along. And he watched it whirl from sight around a bend. Then, with a deep sigh of relief, he turned—face to face with another visitor!

Not an artist this time! But a regular hombre—a prospector, Wishful figured him. For he was brown and dusty, and dressed like a miner, in high, laced boots and old khaki. But a longer look filled the boy with alarm, for there was something hostile in the stranger's bearing. And he made no reply to his greeting, nor to those of the other boys, now coming apprehensively out to meet him. And Wishful was seized by a premonition that they weren't done with this artistic deal, and by fear that it might be a serious offense to pass off a counterfeit painting!

"Are you," sternly the stranger regarded the uneasy group, "the cowboys who claim to have G. Wilkes Lynn here doing a portrait?"

A moment of guilty silence. Then, "We was," confessed All-in, "but the job's done, an' Geewhillikins is gone."

The stranger frowned as if that puzzled him. "This painter," he asked, as though he did not believe there was such a man, "did he call himself G. Wilkes Lynne?"

Wishful started. "Come to think of it," he slowly admitted, "he did not. He called hisself the maestro. But we seen a piece in the paper about the maestro comin' here, so we knew it was him."

"But this portrait he painted," pressed their inquisitor. "Show it to me."

Triangle Z almost passed out entirely. Little Pard sidled behind Hushaby.

Miserably, All-in explained: "We would if we could, but we can't!"

"Why not?" the visitor asked.

"Because it ain't here! It ain't anywhere! It's—— Oh, my stars!"

Seeing their utter confusion, the visitor made an abrupt change of front.

Sitting down on the bunk-house steps, he said in a friendly way:

"Boys, it's mighty necessary for me to know just what *did* go on. Now, suppose you tell me all about it."

Trusting to instinct and blind luck, Wishful began: "We wanted a picture of Pard so bad, that we——"

"Start with our heifer," interrupted All-in.

And Wishful did; he stammered out the whole story. He told how their heifer had hooked the pink butte—a faint chuckle from the visitor encouraging him. How they had been inspired to hire the maestro to paint Pard, but he had made their baby look "like a problem in arithmetic." The chuckles swelled to a roar of mirth. How mad they had got, and how they had burned up the painting. Here Wishful had to wait a minute to make himself heard. Everything he said seemed to tickle the stranger, but nothing so much as how he had counterfeited the painting and sold it to Horn. That information sent the newcomer into a regular spasm.

And when the cowboy was done, the man wiped his eyes, and wanted to know what the maestro looked like.

"Like an artist," Wishful assured him. "Long-haired an' hungry——"

"With a gallerous mustache!" All-in couldn't forget that.

The man slapped his thigh. "Percival Sneed!" he exclaimed.

"You know him?" chorused the boys, who had lost all their fear of him.

"To my sorrow," he owned, with a wry smile. "I just refused to go his bail—— Yes, he's in jail in Gunsight. Your sheriff locked him up last night for beating his board bill in Chaos. So he called himself the maestro? Well, he would! That means master, you know—and Sneed thinks he's good. Why, he isn't even an artist, but a hanger-on! There's always a raft of them around every artists' colony. Evidently the fellows who came out with Horn were of the same phony type. Always taking up every freak cult. Not that cubistic art—the style of your painting, as I understand—is that by any means. It's an established and widely accepted school. But, personally, I prefer a painting to look like the subject."

"So do we!" declared the boys fervently.

"But," he begged them, stooping to take up little Pard, "don't judge artists by nuts like Sneed—a pest to real workers. Every profession has them. I've been trying to dodge them ever since I came. Most real artists are regular fellows. As for Jeff Horn, he's got more money than sense. He'd buy any kind of a daub if he thought it had a big name."

"I wisht he hadn't bought mine," fretted Wishful. "He wouldn't take no for an answer. I feel guilty about it."

"Forget it!" advised the visitor, with a reminiscent chuckle. "He thought the painting was worth a pile of money, and he was willing to sting you. Be a good lesson for him. Now, I'll tell you what I'd do," he said, trotting the bunk-house baby on his knee, "I'd get some good photographer to come out here and take some pictures of this little shaver. A natural enlargement will be more satisfying, and quite as artistic."

Throughout the conversation Wishful had been studying the stranger. Who was this weather-beaten hombre, who spoke with such intimate knowledge of art? Not an artist, that was sure! For he was as ordinary as an old shoe, and not a bit queer. But—why was he dodging pests like Percival? And why had he been so hostile when he came? Something clicked in Wishful's brain, and he said, with great respect:

"Partner, I didn't catch your name."

The man looked up, saw by the boy's expression that he had guessed, and, as though sorry he had to, he confessed:

"I'm G. Wilkes Lynne."

Logging

By Howard J. Perry

Author of "Logger or Quitter?" etc.

A FRONTIER industry since man first hewed and hacked at a tree with a stone hatchet, logging has led civilization's westward march until to-day it makes its last great stand on the mountainous slopes of the Pacific. And Mother Nature, jealously fearful of the threat to her remaining timberlands, confronts her enemy with innumerable obstacles, that have caused the experiences of loggers in other sections to pale into insignificance.

While the equipment and methods invented and used for many years in the pine regions of the United States sufficed there without improvement, they proved utterly inadequate when man attempted to employ them to log the forest giants of the West. Measuring from five to fifteen feet in diameter and towering skyward fully two hundred, their marshalled forces rolling back on the timbered slopes of the Cascades, these mighty monarchs scoffed derisively when attacked with the methods practiced elsewhere. Thus man's ingenuity was challenged, and he answered with improved equipment, together with a daring courage that has lifted the logging industry into the spotlight of the frontier's most stirring romances.

One can easily picture the bulging eyes of the pioneer Eastern logger when he first glimpsed the gigantic trees of the Pacific. The pages of history are mute on the incident, but the scene has been reënacted with unfailing precision as the visitor familiar with timber in other parts of the country comes in the presence of the giant fir or cedar.

The history of "big stick" logging, as it is known, is not so old that the impressions of the pioneers cannot be obtained first-hand. There are many of them still in the woods to-day who came from the fading timberlands of the

upper Mississippi Valley in answer to the call of lumbering's bonanza. And they recite a colorful tale of the early struggles to log the vast and rugged areas.

First of all, the enormous size of the trees was an obstacle not easily surmounted. Even the saws had to be of greater length, and the science of proper falling had to be revised to meet the problem presented by the great monarchs. Then came the matter of moving these trees, once they were felled and trimmed. A twenty-foot pine, measuring not more than three feet at the butt, could be slung between a high-wheel outfit or dragged over a level terrain by a team of oxen or horses; but when it came to transporting a log that was six or ten feet in diameter, and twenty feet long, when cut into sections, over irregular ground, there arose an immediate need for something more powerful.

The donkey engine, with its steam power and thick steel cables, had not come into being in those first days. For a short time, at least, it was not required. There was a lot of timber along the margins of the many waterways that fingered in from the Pacific, and as long as these trees remained it was a simple matter to cut them and roll them down into the water where they were boomed and towed to the mills.

But it was not long before this easily accessible timber vanished and the logger looked hungrily at the rugged, mountainous uplands clothed in the greatest timber stand known to the world. But to get it down to water was the problem. Even the rivers that bisected those upper regions failed to answer the question as they might have done in the East.

They were torrential streams with churning white water leaping madly down the steep gorges. But Nature has never permanently intimidated man. Consequently, the attention of the loggers was turned to these rivers. Fearlessly they cut and rolled their logs to those waters, holding them in strong booms along some backwater until they were ready to drive.

Then came the call of courage and the answer by the famous "river dogs" of the West; men, the pick of the Eastern drives, who undertook to drive the logs down the rivers. Viewing those raging torrents to-day, it is not difficult to imagine the stirring scenes that must have transpired in those times.

To slip from a spinning log as it careened and gyrated over the rapids meant a plunge into the glacial water that threatened to suck the unfortunate logger down to instant death. And should the logs become jammed in some narrow canyon flanked by perpendicular walls of rock, the result was disaster.

Again the pages of history fail to recount the tragedies and acts of heroism that must have been daily occurrences. The old-timers will sometimes mention them, but only in grim monosyllables that warn the seeker of information that he is asking about things that are unpleasant to recall.

Soon, however, the timber along these rivers was gone, and still the millions of acres of virgin growth nodded their heads before the sea winds as though confidently secure in their mountain fastnesses from the threat of man's advance.

But man was not to be denied. A new empire was in the building. A rapidly growing nation needed homes. The West Coast woods were found to be most desirable and adaptable for construction.

The donkey engine came into being. Mounted on skids that were nothing more than small trees cut into sled runners, the engines chattered and puffed as they drew themselves up the slopes. Then when they were securely anchored, the falling crews went on ahead and cut the trees. Steel cables

made into chokers were fastened around the end and the logs were yanked by force down to the water, or to points where they could be shot down long chutes into the rivers.

This method sufficed until operations extended back into the canyons and jagged hillsides. There the loggers discovered that it was slow and expensive work to try and pull the logs over the rocky ground. The front ends were continually burying their noses in some depression with such suddenness that cables snapped and the lives of hook-tenders, choker setters, rigging slingers, and even donkey crews, were endangered.

Again man's intelligence and ingenuity responded and the spar-tree and high lead were born. It was discovered that by running the cable through a heavy block at the top of some stump or tree and thence into the woods the logs, when hauled in, would be uptilted and lifted over any obstacles.

Simultaneously the high-climber, that romantic and daring figure of the Western timberlands, came into being. To get that big block fastened to the top of some stump or tree high enough to permit efficient work meant that some one must climb a sturdy tree, trim off its branches, cut off the top, and rig it with blocks and guys for braces to meet the pull of the powerful donkey engine.

To do this high-climbing called for the greatest courage and steadiest nerves. It was a job with a premium and those who made good could demand the highest wages.

Many were called but few were accepted. Youth, stamina, and steel-cast assurance were needed. At first the spar-trees were fifty or seventy-five feet in height, but as the demand grew for long hauls and steeper grades, the spar-trees became higher, until to-day they are topped at two hundred feet and rigged with blocks that weigh from a thousand to fifteen hundred pounds.

Next followed the sky-line method of logging. This is where logs must be carried through the air across canyons. Spar-trees are topped on either side of the canyon and extending from these is a huge steel cable upon which is hung a fall block that is hauled across the canyon and to which the log is hooked. Then it is lifted up and carried across and dropped down beside the loading platform.

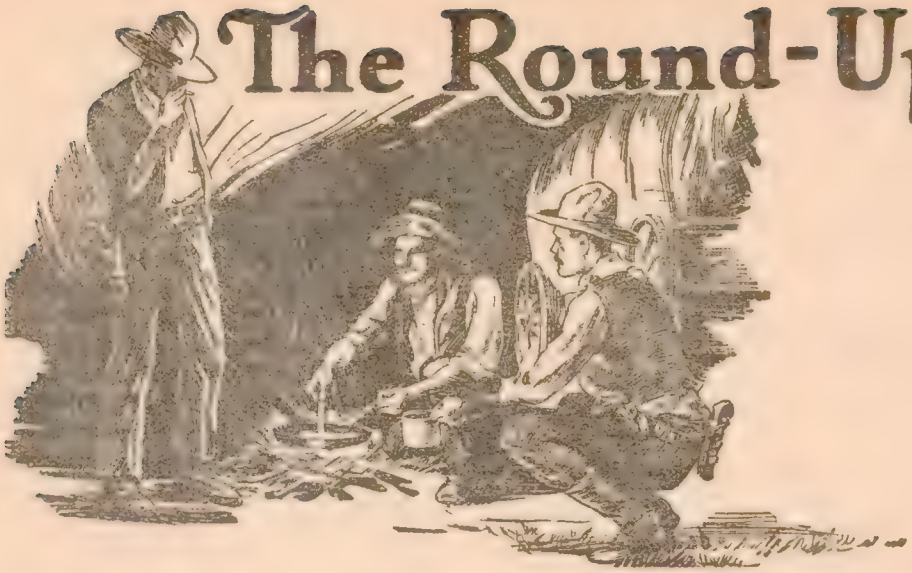
Other problems were met with the same dispatch. Railroads had to be constructed into the mountains to bring the logs to water or direct to mills. Donkey engines were built larger and more powerful, with multiple drums that act in two or three capacities at once.

Thus to-day the shrill toot of the donkey can be heard far up on the forest slopes of the Cascades where crews of rugged, fearless men struggle through the day taking out the mighty giants that once felt so safe from the hands of man.

WHY SOME HENS LEFT HOME

IT is a farmer of Pierce City, Nebraska, who supplies this interesting data, which may have a special appeal to any who would like to see the tables turned on those notorious peckers, the hens! The farmer says that flocks of pheasants are entering his chicken yard and chasing the hens away. He adds that although his Leghorn roosters can crow over—that is to say, whip—the pheasant roosters, the former are too heavily outnumbered to protect their flocks. Evidently, it is an unusual occurrence for the pheasant to attack the home-loving hen, and pondering on the troubles which assail him from all quarters, the farmer will not be blamed by any one if he loses his temper and runs for his gun in season and out of season.

The Round-Up



WELL, folks, this is the time of year when we like to see every one of you warm and comfortable, so, draw close to the fire. Also, we're going to take a ride of inspection this week, and the folks as has the best woodpiles is goin' to have their names read out in meetin' here by way of special commendation. Always did judge a rancher by the size of his woodpile, when it gets along this time of year.

Now, the first one of the folks to speak this evenin' is T. F. Seehorn, Lenoir, North Carolina:

"Boss and Folks: I have not only enjoyed reading stories by the different writers, but the talks at Round-up by readers from all over the country are very interesting. Of course, among so many we find some critics that are very hard to please. One of our friends some time back jumped on Robert Ormond Case with both feet. Now, I am one of Case's greatest admirers; especially do I like his 'Lonesome' and 'Windy' stories of the Condon country. I hope he may never let Lonesome and Windy be killed, as Max Brand did Dan Berry. For Max has never quite equaled his Dan Berry stories since, though Geraldi is a crackajack. We must remember that no writer can give us a one-hundred-per-cent story at all times.

"I was very much interested in the 'Yukon Drive' by Mr. Case. The author lives somewhere in western Oregon, and the plots of all his stories are in Oregon. I understand he once lived in the Condon country; anyway, he can make you feel as if it were all real. So much so that I wrote my son, who is working on a ranch in that country, to go over and call on Lonesome and Windy and give them my regards.

"Now, I hope I have not worried you, but overlook an old farmer and trader that still likes a good Arabian buckskin and never owned and never will own an automobile, so you may know I'm an old-timer."

A sour dough from 7127 Clyde Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, John F. Bushnell by name, he says:

"Hello, Boss—an' Howdy, Folks: Mostly I like to jes' sprawl an' listen in tuh the purrin' an' the caterwaulin' roun'

the fire, stayin' on the windward side an' not actin' ambitious in case they might be a call to rustle more firewood.

"But I bin cravin' to put a query to this dude-'n'-waddy university, representin' all the honest-to-goodness larnin' they is on this planet, an' then some.

"Readin' at the end of 'Happy Valley' of the winnin' of a scrap with the weapons of laughter has brought this here interrogatory urge o' mine to the top a-squirmin', an' I can no longer hold to the policy of tenderfoots are to be seen an' not heard.

"What I want to know is, has any o' you hombres, or especially you larned gals, ever tried laughin' at a horse out loud in a time o' worry an' crisis? An' if you have, whar did it get you?

"I tried it several times on horses an' Texas mules, an' results were sech as to be surprisin' to anybody thet didn't already savvy thet a horse or a half horse is more than half human.

"Meanin' thet the horse breed don't no ways like to appear ridiklus under any circumstances whatsomever. Twict I've had 'em come over whar I stood quiet an' unmovin' an' rest their nose agin' my shoulder, buddy fashion, an' a coupla other times, when astride, I had 'em quiet down while I got holt o' the lines an' stirrups.

"If this here bustin' in where angels fear to tread by a tenderfoot raises a snort or two, I ain't carin', 'cause anyway, I got it outa my system. An' hopin' I won't be noticed in particular, I'll jes' slope back out o' the glare and listen some more, bein' as the fire 'pears to be needin' pokin' up."

Havin' rid all the way from Hallettsville, Texas, Mrs. Mae Thigpen is here to remark:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I've been a reader of your magazine for more years than I can remember, and I'll tell the cockeyed world that the good old WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE is the best on the news stand. My hubby and I would walk, not one mile, but five, for it.

"Just tell Bob Case to keep up the good work; I wouldn't miss his stories for anything. His 'Lonesome' and 'Windy' Stories are great, also the ones about 'Dynamite Smith.' I've just finished the 'The Yukon Drive.' It's a humdinger. I also like Cherry Wilson's stories. Wish we could get some more like 'Empty Saddles.'

"Ray Humphreys, Max Brand, and George Owen Baxter are great. I also liked John Frederick's 'Chinook.' Please give them all my praise, boss.

"I wish some one would send me the words of two songs. They are old songs: ' 'Neath the Shadow of the Pine,' and 'The Fatal Wedding.' "

Mrs. Bachman, who very kindly supplied us with some of the words of one of those songs a while back, will forgive us, maybe, if we ask "A. M." from Bend, Oregon, to repeat those words with some additional ones he knows. Will you oblige us, "A. M."?

Sure I will, Mrs. Thigpen, Boss, and Folks:

" 'Neath the Shadow of the Pines."

We wandered in the shadow of the pines, my love and I,
As the wind was blowing freshly from the sea;
But a sudden fitful darkness stole across the summer sky,
And a shadow came between my love and me.
Some hasty words were spoken, and then, almost unawares,
Hasty answers to unthinking anger led;
And our heartsick, bitter longing, and our weeping and our prayers,
Ne'er can make those false and cruel words unsaid.

Chorus

Come back to me, sweetheart, and love me as before;
Back, back to me, sweetheart, and leave me nevermore.
In life's dark pathway, the sun no longer shines.
Come, my love, and meet me 'neath the shadow of the pines.

You took the ring I gave you,
Nor cast a glance at me,
As you held the jeweled trinket in your hand.
And then you turned and tossed it in the waters of the sea,
Where the waves were idly splashing on the sand.
I awake from bitter dreaming, to call aloud your name;
I sleep again to dream of you once more.
All my stubbornness is broken,
I'll admit I was to blame,
Forgive me, dear, and love me as before.

Some praise for two of the writers. It will be given by F. Sewall Brown, Newark, California:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I'm buttin' in again to see if that Mewhirter gent is in the assemblage. If he is, I'd crave to hear his opinion of 'The Yukon Drive,' by Robert Ormond Case, just completed in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. If he hasn't experienced a change of heart in regard to the ability of this author now, his grouch is shorely incurable.

"I'm not in the habit of fallin' in love with the black villain of a story, but somehow I did that very thing with Lawson, the sneerin', double-crossin' son of a gun whose avowed intention was to frustrate the plans of Rondo, the chief of the expedition. Somehow or other, Lawson ascended to an elevation a leetle higher than that occupied by Rondo, himself, when he, alone and unaided, saved the two lovers from a watery grave. I'd like to ask some of you writin' sharks if it would not have been a good idea for Rondo to have evened up the score by saving Lawson's life in some equally difficult situation.

"'Kansas' and the widow are just too good for words in their cave-dweller methods of love-making, and Molly is a darlin'.

"No one got killed, for which I want to pat Bob Case on the back again. I'm still strong for him, but Cherry Wilson is trompin' on his heels."

Flint, Michigan, is represented here to-night by Mrs. P. L. Petrides, 212 W. Hemphill Road, that city:

"BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP AND ALL: I just had to say my say, and then make room for some one else. I'm rather tardy saying it, but I guess it's all right just the same.

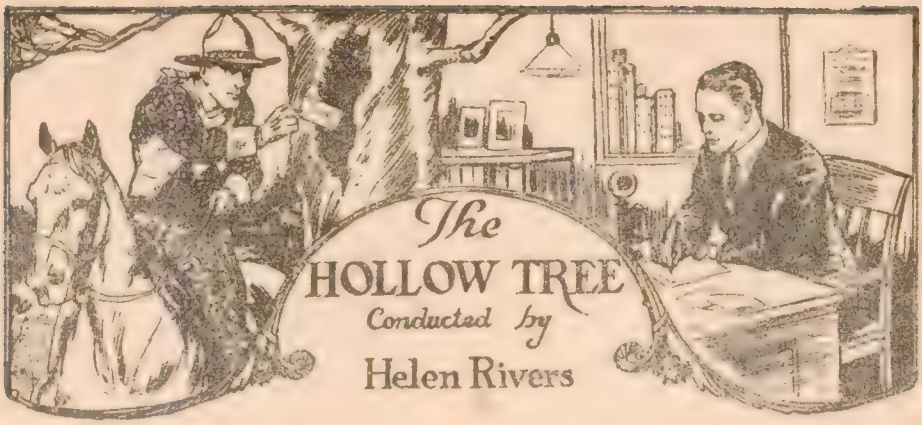
"Tell Max Brand he doesn't need to worry what a few readers say, as long as the majority are for him—and a good majority. Ask Cherry Wilson when she is going to give us some more stories about 'Pard' and 'Lullaby.'

"I wish WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE all the success it deserves."

"A Reader," from Pima, Arizona, says:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: Just a few lines in favor of your little magazine. I like it fine, and the writers are all splendid. Max Brand always makes his heroes so strong that really I've never had the pleasure of meeting a gentleman that could compare with any of his men. I just can't believe the perfect man exists. So there!

"Cherry Wilson is my favorite, and I wish she would always write serials, and a whole book of them each time."



Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish: otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

THANKSGIVING! Over the great staked plains of the Longhorn country there is thanksgiving in the home ranches of the west Texas outfits. There is thanksgiving in the Big Bend country of the Rio Grande, and all along the border. But in every corner of every range there is a home ranch—and there is thanksgiving.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: This is Thanksgiving time in west Texas. Out here on the great staked plains of the Longhorn State there is Thanksgiving in the home ranches of the big outfits. And in every little bunk house there are cowboys who will gather together on Thanksgiving Day. Yes, I live on a ranch where the sagebrush grows, and where the white-faced dogies roam the great staked plain. Out where you fry your bacon in the open range land, and where the cowboy hits his saddle at the first gray dawn.

Folks, it's kinda lonesome here on this ranch, even though it is Thanksgiving time. I'm hoping to corral a lot of pals from among the girls of the Gang. And I'll be thankful, this Thanksgiving time, for a lot of mail. I'll be looking to hear from you-all *muy pronto.* Adios, folks.

RUBY JACKSON.

Jayton, Texas.

Old-timer of the trails.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: This bein' Thanksgivin' time, maybe some of you folks would like to know what the old-timer is likely to be a-plannin' for his Thanksgivin' table, away out in the wilderness somewhere. While the lumberjack is havin' his Thanksgivin' in a cook camp, and the cowboy is havin' his in the home ranch, the old prospector may be a-cookin' a handful of rice over a camp fire, somewhere out on the desert. Maybe that old-timer won't prepare the few grains jest as you city folks would do it, but it will be mighty tasty jest the same. He'll likely put the rice into an old fry pan with a little fat, and he'll add jest enough water—water bein' scarce, perhaps—to cook the rice until it swells up nice and soft. He won't be a-havin' any spuds, this old-timer, for spuds are too hard to pack on a burro's back, and rice'll take the place o' the spuds, mighty fine. The buckaroos who pack spuds will likely prepare 'em in the old-timer's style—squaw spuds. And I'll tell you-all about that, too, if you-all want to ask me about it some time.

This hombre lay up two nights at a deer lick, but failed to get one. Three porcupines, that will make excellent eatin', will be the fare of this old-timer. Yep, I'm across the water from Englemont, folks, and I'll be a-rowin' over for my mail *muy pronto.*

GEORGE EELES.

Englemont, British Columbia, Canada.

Below the Rio Grande.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: This is old Mexico, south of the Rio Grande. Do you-all want to hear about the wonders Mexico keeps in secret from you hombres north of the old Rio? If so, come along, folks, *muy pronto.* I'd like to corral some of the hombres who know the trails north of the Rio Grande.

ARNULFO DURAN.

Lerdo 55, Mexico, D. F.

The great Southwest.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We are a married couple who would like to locate in Arizona, New Mexico, or in the Ozark Mountains of Missouri. And we'd like to find a couple of pards, a married couple like ourselves, between thirty-five and forty years of age, to trek with us, and who would be interested in a life of trapping, hunting, et cetera. We'd like to find a couple of pards who would be interested in getting out and living the outdoor life. G. V. HENKLE.

10518 Tabor Street, Palms Station, Los Angeles, California.

Good old Wyoming.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We are Californians, but we sure do like Wyoming. Cheyenne is a town where we would like to stop for a good long time, and there are a lot of trails out of Cheyenne that we'd like to take. We'd like to trek over the trail to Hells Acres, too, and would sure appreciate it if some one living over that way, or who has been through that stamping ground, would write us about it.

We live in a little town in California called Ojai—an Indian name meaning "bird's nest"—and this little town is tucked away like a bird's nest in Ventura County, in southern California. CALIFORNIANS.

Care of The Tree.

Looking for a home ranch.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am a lonely girl of sixteen, and am looking for a home ranch. I can ride a horse, do ranch work, and can keep house, too. I have no home, and am hoping to find a motherly woman somewhere in our great West who will open the doors of her home ranch to me. You-all will find me a square shooter with everybody.

PEARL PRYSLUPSKI.

Box 133, Marquette, Iowa.

The old six-gun.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I don't suppose that girls collect old shooting irons as a general rule, but here is one member of the old Holla who is interested in six-guns, .44s, all old shooting irons, sabers, et cetera. I also have a hobby of collecting old bills, old books, and, in fact, I have quite a miniature museum at my home in the sunny State of California. I would like to swap experiences with folks who travel and who collect things. I do not want to exchange specimens or trade novelties just at present, but I would like to hear from the hobby riders of the Gang.

NELL LOUNSBERRY.

Newport Beach, California.

This is Thanksgiving time, folks, when we-all are especially thankful for our friends and our Pen Pals. Be thankful for your old friends, and reach out for new pals along the way. The Hollow Tree friend-maker badge will bring new pals to you.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to the Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

"I'm a hombre from the Buckeye State. I work on a farm and have a lot of time and nothing to do with it. I've worked about a year at silver fox ranching. I'm looking for Pen Pals from every State in the Union. I'm also interested in timber." This is from Alva Oliver, R. F. D., No. 3, Chillicothe, Ohio.

R. W. Webber, Mount Horeb, Wisconsin, is interested in corresponding with some one who knows some of the old-time cowboy songs.

"Gene," care of The Tree, would like to hear from folks who are interested in ranch life. She has a big place in Oregon that is the real thing in ranches.

"Will you please insert this appeal for pen friends in The Hollow Tree?" asks Barney T. "I have traveled ever since I was eleven years old, from Hawaii to England, Italy, India, from the Yukon to Argentina. Am fond of sports." This Gangster is twenty-two years old. Send letters care of The Tree.

"I am only fifteen and would like to correspond with any one in America. I would like to know something about cowboys, and all about your country. I would like to exchange photographs, and perhaps I would be able to tell you some of South Africa's history." This letter comes from Douglas Pretorius of 574 First Street, Gezina, Pretoria, Transvaal, South Africa.

Marvin Carlisle, M. D., Sternberg General Hospital, Manila, P. I., writes that he would like to correspond with young people in the United States. "I am now in the Philippine Islands," he says, "and it sure is a lonesome place to be. I promise to answer all letters received and will tell all that I know about these islands and the Hawaiians. I am twenty years old. Will exchange snapshots."

"I will be glad to answer any questions about this part of the country," says W. R. D., Route 1, Box 582-B, San Lorenzo, Alameda County, California. "for those who think of coming this way. The latchstring is always out. Will exchange snaps or postcards."

Miss Maru Pike, 122 Victoria Road, Devonport, Auckland, New Zealand, says that she would like to correspond with people in America. She expects to visit America soon and she would like to be given some idea of a good itinerary.

"I am a lonesome waddie who lives in the old East. I'm getting homesick to see the great West and I'll gladly answer all Pen Pals who will write to me." This hombre is Glenn D. Dunn, and his address is R. R. 8, Seymour, Indiana.

A new member of the Hollow Tree Gang is Ray Felker, Route 1, Box 150, Cumberland, Maryland. Ray lives in the heart of the Allegheny Mountains and likes to hunt, fish, and trap.

Another army boy stationed at the Sternberg General Hospital, Manila, P. I., is Eugene Cousins, who also asks for Pen Pals. "I'd like very much to get in touch with some of the people in the United States," writes Eugene. "I have a lot of spare time and like to write letters. I live about a mile from the largest dancing pavilion in the world. There is always something to do here—dancing, swimming, and so forth, or you may go out to the sea wall and sit under the shade of a palm tree." Eugene is twenty-four and a good, all-around sport.

"Where can I get a map and information regarding Manitoba Province, Canada, especially along the Saskatchewan River? If there is some trapper, miner, or farmer who lives along there, I would appreciate hearing from him." The address of this Gangster is O. B. D., Jr., care of The Tree.

Miss Kay, care of The Tree, writes: "Could you manage to find room for a fifteen-year-old girl in the Old Holla? I live in a smoky little city which is tucked in somewhere in northeastern Ohio. I am interested in the fresh, free-of-smoke air. I would like to hear from girls in California and from the cowgirls in other Western States."

WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

By John North

IF we remember correctly, we closed our remarks last week with a promise to Sam M., of Norfolk, Virginia, who is asking some mighty pertinent questions about the Boulder Dam project. As so many of you hombres are interested in this project, we think you'll be glad to have this matter come up for discussion. "Can you tell me, Mr. North, what arrangements are being made for the housing of the workmen who will build the Boulder Dam?" asks Sam. "I've read a good deal about this project from time to time, but I've never seen this particular point mentioned. How long will it take to build the dam? How many workmen will be employed? Please give me all the information you have on this subject."

We are mighty glad to pass on to Sam the latest news we have about the Boulder Dam. According to a bulletin which we have just received from the department of the interior, plans are being drawn for a town which will house the workmen who will take part in building the dam, together with their families and the other population necessary to their comfortable existence. The site of this town, which will be on the brink of the Colorado River, was selected by Secretary Wilbur, and Elwood Mead, Commissioner of Reclamation. It is on the Nevada side of the river on the nearest level land, a little more than a mile from the dam site. Plans are now under way for making this as-yet-unnamed town a model community.

If Sam is familiar with that part of the West he will recall that as the visitor approaches the Colorado River, driving from Las Vegas, Nevada, to Black Canyon, his road winds down a canyon which opens out fanlike into a gravel-strewn valley. The view from this canyon is down on a panorama of the Colorado River, looking upstream, with huge black cliffs rising perpendicularly from the water and a chaos of bare rock mountains stretching away for a hundred miles in the background. It is a scene of such grandeur as is rarely found even in the Rockies.

Uncle Sam's bulletin states that the construction town for the great dam will be located at the point where this canyon widens out and affords a favorable setting. The dam itself will be a mile away, over a chaos of broken hills. The bottom of the canyon, where the work must begin and where the greater part of it must be done will be at a level

sixteen hundred feet below the rim and the town. Into the bottom of the great canyon there will go every day a thousand men, who will emerge again when their work is done and return to the town.

The task of lowering these men into the canyon and bringing them out again presents in itself a bit of spectacular engineering. It will be accomplished through the installation of huge elevators which will lift their passengers a perpendicular one thousand feet, which is practically twice as great a lift as that which carries passengers to the top floors of our tallest skyscrapers.

Water for the proposed town will be pumped from the Colorado River. Refrigeration will be provided. Every care will be taken to preserve the health of the workers. The surroundings, however, are particularly favorable from a health standpoint.

The town itself will be located on government land. The government will retain ownership of the land and lease it to those who live on it or use it for commercial purposes. One of the features of these leases will be that they will continue only under the period of good behavior of the tenant. It is the intention of the government not to allow bootleggers or other law violators to interfere with the well-being of its workmen while assigned to this huge task. The power to terminate leases, and, therefore, residence, in this town, will be used as one of the means of enforcing proper conduct. This will be no boisterous frontier town. It is hoped that simple homes, gardens with fruits and flowers, schools, and playgrounds, will make this a wholesome American community.

The construction of the great works at Black Canyon will require a period of eight years. Something like a thousand workmen will be constantly employed. With their families, and those who are drawn to the site by the general activity, it is estimated that this town will have a population of some four thousand people. Sam, as well as the rest of you interested hombres, should bear in mind, however, that there is no employment at present, nor will there be any in this section for perhaps another year.

The proposed town is being planned as a permanent community which is expected to live even after the construction period has passed. When the reservoir is full, the water will come up the valley almost to the town and the great lake will stretch away for a hundred miles through a country of rare scenic beauty. The region is one of admirable healthfulness, and it is thought that a popular resort may here grow up when the reservoir has been so developed as to provide its incidental attractions.

Plans are already well developed for construction of automobile highways from Las Vegas, Nevada, and Kingman, Arizona, to the dam. When the dam is completed it will become a bridge as well and link these two roads together. It will then be possible for tourists on a transcontinental trip to come past this dam and see the reservoir with little or no increase in the distance traveled. Eventually this will doubtless be a popular tourist route, which will develop possibilities for the model town which is to look out upon the world's greatest artificial lake.

And speaking of highways reminds us of the query of D. K. G., of Omaha, Nebraska. "Can you tell me the route of the Inland Empire Highway, Mr. North?"

We surely can! The Inland Empire Highway runs from Ellensburg, through Yakima, to Walla Walla, and from Walla Walla to Spokane. This trail is in eastern Washington and traverses nine counties—Walla Walla, Yakima, Benton, Franklin, Columbia, Whitman, Garfield, Spokane, and King. These

counties include about fifty per cent of the population and wealth of the State, as well as perhaps the most highly developed agricultural section of Washington. D. K. G. will find it an interesting route, for it lacks nothing in the way of beautiful scenery.

Ralph D., of Reading, Pennsylvania, is another hombre who is trekking to the Northwest and wants some information about a certain town out that way. "Do you know anything about the town of Stayton, out in Oregon, Mr. North? I'm planning on pulling up stakes here and making tracks for the West some time soon. I expect to go in for farming, and have been advised to look up Stayton. Naturally enough, I'd like some accurate information before taking such a step, and feel that I can depend upon you to give me the facts as they are."

In the face of that compliment, we'll surely have to try not to disappoint Ralph. Stayton is in the southeastern part of Marion County, on the paved highway and Santiam River, twenty-one miles from Salem. It has a population of twelve hundred. This Oregon town is in the center of a highly diversified farming district, the land including not only the rich bottom land of the Santiam River, but rolling uplands.

Ralph will find three distinct types of soil in the Stayton district. The bottom land is subirrigated, and very rich with a sandy loam mixture. The next level of land is the type that is most successfully irrigated. The rolling ground is of a hilly nature and of the red-shot type, better suited to the growing of berries, grains, nuts, and fruits of all kinds, without irrigation.

One of the most successful coöperative canneries in the Williamette Valley is located in Stayton. The success of this cannery has helped to create markets for strawberries, raspberries, and cherries, as well as vegetables. Another industry of which this Western town is proud is its woolen mill operating thirty looms.

The location of Stayton on the Santiam River not only supplies power for the woolen mill, but also provides abundant water for the irrigated country. In fact, Ralph will find this town in the center of one of the most successful irrigated districts in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. The old-timers in the irrigated districts around Stayton say that the vegetable, fruit, and berry growers do not worry as to whether they will have a crop, because it is almost a one hundred per cent bet that they will.

Altogether, we'd say that this district offers many advantages to the farmer. Prices are low. Settlers are welcome. And last, but not least, there are plenty of good fishing and hunting.

If anybody wants any additional facts, we'll be glad to tell them where they may be obtained, pronto.

A NEW CHILDREN'S HIGH SCHOOL IN CALIFORNIA

SURELY this is the golden age for school children, for never in the history of the world was learning made so alluring! An object lesson in geography can rarely be made so convincing as when given in an airplane nicely fitted up as a classroom, with teacher, and blackboard, and desks, and chalk, while flying over the country taught about.

The fortunate youngsters of the Junior Airport of the Hawley Playground at Los Angeles fly over southern California in a trimotor plane while the teacher instructs them. A photograph shows the lucky youngsters all in their very high school at nine o'clock and deeply attentive to the day's "aërial geography lesson." One of these days we may all find that flying is not only a pleasure but a duty!

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

HONOLULU KID.—Received your letter from Frisco. All is well. Please write to C. H. T., care of this magazine.

JEWELL.—Would like to hear from the children of Fletcher Webster Jewell. Please write to Mrs. Mary Clem, care of this magazine.

BUD.—Important. Please write to your mother, Mud, same address, or care of this magazine.

T. E. R.—Come home, and we will help you all we can. The babies are all right, and we love you. Please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

COX, EARL J.—I need you. Spike does, too. Please come home or write to Retta, care of this magazine.

MACMURRY or **MACMURRAY.**—My father, John MacMurry, had eight children. He died in 1911. Believe he ran away from home when he was sixteen years old. Would like to hear from any of his relatives. Address, Anna, care of this magazine.

ROY, PRISCILLA.—Formerly of Augusta, Maine. Last seen in New York City in the summer of 1927. Important news. Information appreciated by H., care of this magazine.

STONE, ARTHUR.—Last heard from in California. News to your advantage. Please write to your sister, Hilda, care of this magazine.

HEBERT, GEORGE.—I forgive everything. Your little son is ill and cries for you. Please come back or write to Ruby, care of this magazine.

H. R. M.—Do you remember Virginia Labelle of 1200 Florida Street, Vallejo, California, in 1924? Important. Please write to Evangeline Black, Box 64, Rome City, Indiana.

LITTLE, WILLARD.—Last heard from in Alabama. Please write to your old pal, Cecil Jolly, Company C, Ninth Infantry, Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

ATTENTION, SHIPMATES.—Would like to hear from any one who served with me in the Asiatics. Please write to Leo Lundie, 6901 Euclid Avenue, Stoneleigh Apartments, Cleveland, Ohio.

GRIFFIN, CHARLES LINCOLN.—Information appreciated by his daughter, Alice Louise Griffin, care of Mrs. Ethel L. Stringer, 516 Elder Street, Santa Monica, California.

GORMLEY, THOMAS.—Last heard from in Crossett, Arkansas. Please write to Jesse Manes, R. F. D. 13, Oakfield, New York.

TICE, HARRY C.—A carpenter. Last heard from in Pemfine, Wisconsin. Please write to Jesse Manes, R. F. D. 13, Oakfield, New York.

MYERS, BENJAMIN LEE.—Last heard from in Marlow, Oklahoma, in 1903. Information appreciated by his sister, Henrietta Spears, 200 Murray Street, Dallas, Texas.

O'CONNOR, J.—Last heard from in New Jersey. Please write to your friend, W. Reynolds, 220 Young Street, West Arunandale, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.

TURBYFILL, MALCOLM.—Last heard from in Culpepper, Virginia, in 1915. Information appreciated by Son, care of this magazine.

SLIM.—Would like to know where you are. Please write to W. A. C., Bill, care of this magazine.

HEACOCK, WALTER.—Please write to Marjorie J. of Adams' Rodeo, care of this magazine.

CARLISLE, A. E.—Hazel is ill, and we need you. Please come home or write to your mother, Mrs. T. J. Carlisle, 1200 East Ninth Street, Little Rock, Arkansas.

COOKE, PATSY.—About twenty-four years old. Last known address, was, in 1927, 19 Shipe Street, Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Important. Please write to Ray Cassidy, Box B, Anamosa, Iowa.

HICKEY, FRANCIS or **FRED.**—Last heard from in Winthrop, Massachusetts. Please write to your old buddy, Albert L. Burley, 1104 Bleecker Street, Utica, New York.

TIBBS, ERNEST.—Nineteen years old. Five feet four inches tall, dark hair, gray eyes, weighs about one hundred and forty pounds. Information appreciated by his mother, Lula Tibbs, Box 16, Trion, Georgia.

TED.—No matter what has happened I am still loving you. Please write to Lillian, care of this magazine.

BARTON WALTER.—We all love you and want to see you. Please write to your wife, Millie, 2931 West Day Street, Richmond, Virginia.

STOVER, PHILIP.—Last heard from in Bozeman, Montana. Please write to your cousin, Don Stover, Artie, West Virginia.

STOVER, "GOOGIE."—Your grandfather is worrying about you. Last heard from in Bozeman, Montana. Please write to Mrs. V. L. Stover, Artie, West Virginia.

SMITH, A. J., and wife.—Last heard from in Crane, Texas, in April, 1929. Please write to your daughter, Mrs. H. C. Wallace, 356 North Main Street, Wichita, Kansas.

BISHOP, A. M.—Last heard from in Chillicothe, Texas. Good news. Please write to your sister, Mrs. N. E. Kanavel, care of this magazine.

WILSON, MRS. GEORGE.—Forty-four years old. Last heard from in El Dorado, Texas, in 1920. Please write to your father, A. J. Goff, Alturos, California.

BAIRD, E. H.—Last heard from in Mexico. Please write to Mrs. R. L. Brown, Box 391, Clinton, Oklahoma.

NOTICE.—I was born in the Yolo County Hospital, Woodland, California, in 1899. My mother, Mrs. Mary McMillen, and two of my sisters, went to Illinois. Bertie, Robert and Perry, my brothers, were sent to Whittier, California. Alice, Dollie, and myself were sent to a foundling home. Any information concerning my people will be appreciated by Rosia Ellen McMillen, care of this magazine.

PERRCAULT, J. F.—We met in Los Angeles, California. I wrote to Winnemucka, Nevada, but my letter was returned. Please write to Scottie, care of this magazine.

SPRINGER, MAE, VELMA, EARL and **MURIEL.**—Last heard from at 1728 Delaware Street, Berkeley, California. Believed to be in Oakland, California. Information appreciated by M. Canfield, 305 Bryant Avenue, Jackson, Michigan.

SHARPE, RUBY, DAISY, EVERETT and **NAOMI.**—Their father and mother both died in Jewett, Missouri, about eleven years ago. They were sent to an orphanage somewhere in Oklahoma. Information appreciated by their cousin, Mrs. Belle Mitchell, 734 East One Hundred and Fourth Street, Los Angeles, California.

WILL, WILLIAM.—Last heard from twenty-one years ago. Information appreciated by his nephew, William Will, 413 Twelfth Street, Union City, Pennsylvania.

ROBERTS, ANNIE.—Please write to your old friend, Lee Clow, now Mrs. Allen Bell, R. R. 13, Box 866, Seattle, Washington.

SMITH, LAURA.—Last heard from in Eudora, Arkansas. Please write to Mary Clark Elkins, Box 961, Breckenridge, Texas.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from members of the 315th French Motor Battery, A. E. F. Address, Mrs. Edward J. Bayliss, Jr., 190 Franklin Street, Portland, Maine.

WALL, PENNY.—Last seen in West Virginia coal mines. Information appreciated by Ruth Dixon, R. R. 2, Box 62, Norfolk, Virginia.

ANDERSON, RALPH.—Twenty-six years old. Five feet six inches tall, light-brown hair, fair complexion. Last seen in Douglas, Arizona, when he was working in the Newberry Store. Left there for Los Angeles, California. A carpenter. I am very lonely. Please write to Mabel, care of this magazine.

PRESCOTT, JACK.—Last heard from in South Dakota. Please write to George W. Cikeman, Company D, Second Infantry, Fort Sheridan, Illinois.

FREEMAN, AARON or **JACK.**—Lived in Wabash, and later in Marion, Indiana. Please write to your son, M. S. Freeman, 745 North Bowman Street, Mansfield, Ohio.

HUHN or **EWEN, WILLIAM.**—Sixty-one years old. Was adopted from an orphanage, in New York, by John Heeneys, of Harpers Ferry, Iowa. Information appreciated by G. M., care of this magazine.

BASS, GUSSIE and **HAROLD.**—Adopted from a home in New York or Brooklyn. Harold is about twenty-four years old, and Gussie is older. Their mother needs them. Information appreciated by their cousin, G. M., care of this magazine.

NOTICE.—Would like to hear from the man who is an agent for a firm that enlarges and paints photographs. Last heard from five years ago in August, in Columbus, Indiana. He is about fifty years old. Information appreciated by G. R. C., care of this magazine.

GLASS, IDA.—Please write to your daughter, Ida, care of this magazine.

A. S. M.—Cannot forget January 1, 1921. Am leaving for home. Please write to Mrs. 1921, care of this magazine.

HANSELL, MRS. GEORGE, or **MRS. CARRIE BELLE DIXON.**—My mother. When I was five years old, in January, 1910, I was placed by her in the Boys' and Girls' Aid Society of Oregon. My father's name was Henry Dixon. I would like to hear from any of my relatives. Address Ella Dixon, care of Mrs. L. Henning, 211 Randall Street, San Francisco, California.

WELCH, NOVELLA.—Of Kentucky. Lived for a while in Akron, Ohio, and later on South Seventeenth Street, in Kenmore, Ohio. Has a brother named Jack. Information appreciated by F. H. M., care of this magazine.

TOWNE, GEORGE E.—Was in Pomona, California, in June, 1927. Information appreciated by his son, George E. Towne, Jr., Company M, Thirty-eighth Infantry, Fort Douglas, Utah.

HUNKO, ROGER or **WALTER.**—Five feet seven inches tall, dark-brown hair, brown eyes, and weighs about one hundred and fifty pounds. Has a scar beneath his right eye. Was last heard from, in July, 1929, when he was working for A. Guthrie Co., at Camp 1, Swiss, West Virginia. Information appreciated by Mrs. Steve Hunko, care of this magazine.

HUFF, JULES W.—A traveling salesman. Last seen in Dallas, Texas, three years ago. His daughters need his help. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Bertha Huff, 2817 Ross Avenue, Dallas, Texas.

CONGDON, WILLIAM W.—Do you remember F. of Dallas, Texas? Please write to F. H., care of this magazine.

I. D.—Received your letter. Big surprise. Am not angry. Please come home or write again to Sister O., care of this magazine.

HESLAM GEORGE ERNEST.—Last heard from in London, Ontario, Canada, in 1927. Sister anxious for news. Please write to E. L. M., care of this magazine.

DAVIS, MRS. VIRGINIA C.—Advertised in this magazine for Hodges, and gave her address as Box 836, Little River Station, Miami, Florida. Please write to Mrs. John D. Kluttz, 322 South Main Street, Mount Airy, North Carolina.

HOWARD, GAY.—Twenty years old. Six feet tall, light hair and blue eyes. Last heard from in Houston, Texas, in June, 1928. Information appreciated by his mother and sister. Address Mrs. Mary Richardson, 130 Mesquite Street, Uvalde, Texas.

SOUTHALL, JEREMIAH, or **JOHN RICHARDS.**—Left England thirty-five years ago. Last heard from in Ohio. Information appreciated by his nephew, Jeremiah, care of this magazine.

SHEY, MAURICE J.—Was working for the Eureka Vacuum Cleaner Co., in Colorado and Wyoming. Last heard from in Pueblo, in 1925. Has a brother in Denver, Colorado. Information appreciated by an old friend, C. J. Weaver, 805 Cherry Street, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

HISLER, GEORGE H.—Five feet four inches tall, brown hair and eyes. A sailor. Last heard from on ship sailing from San Pedro, California, to Tacopilla, Chili. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Mattie Simmons, Route 2, Box 12, Kissimmee, Florida.

QUARATO, MRS. USEPPA, nee **HISLER.**—Blond hair and blue eyes. Was in Florida in 1926 or 1927. Last heard from in Bangor, Maine. Information appreciated by her sister, Mrs. Mattie Simmons, Route 2, Box 12, Kissimmee, Florida.

BUSTER, H. G. O.—Please write to your sister, Mrs. L. P. Weber, 2025 South Eighth Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.

BROOKS, MRS. ELIZABETH, nee **TYLER.**—Fifty-six years old. Last heard from in Yonkers, New York, in November, 1894. Information appreciated by T. Tyler, Box 361, Middletown, Connecticut.

NELSON, CURLIE.—Five feet six inches tall, weighs about one hundred and five pounds, brown hair and eyes. Left home eight years ago. Last heard from in St. Louis, Missouri. Information appreciated by Amer Nesbitt, Route 2, Box 24, Hazelhurst, Mississippi.

LEWIS, ELLA.—Please write to Colman, care of this magazine.

McCOURTNEY.—My father's name was Henry Clay McCourtney, and he was born in 1853. Taught school somewhere in Indiana, and died in June, 1896. Would like to hear from any of his people. Address Mattie Gem Wolfe, Walbuska, Nevada

CARLOCK.—Would like to hear from any one having that name. Address Mattie Gem Wolfe, Walbuska, Nevada.

MURPHY, ED, or **E. M. BURNS.**—Left Thermopolis, Wyoming, in December, 1921. Last heard from in Portland, Oregon. Information appreciated by Joanna Hauntz, Box 294, Burlington, Wyoming.

SMITH, DAVID E.—Twenty-four years old. Last heard from in the Vancouver Barracks, at Vancouver, Washington, in 1924. Was in the Seventh Infantry Band. Information appreciated by his brother, Elmer C. Smith, 1018 McCarter Avenue, Erie, Pennsylvania.

DOCKERTY, MARIE.—Last heard from in Denver, Colorado, at the Clifton-Hughes School, in the spring of 1922. Please write to an old friend, J. W. H., Box 12, Webb City, Missouri.

HILL, JACK.—Baby Evelyn needs you. Please write to M. Wilburn, 7120 Avenue H, Houston, Texas.

HUBER, ALBERT C.—Was in the hospital at Fort McPherson, Atlanta, Georgia, in 1891. Information appreciated by J. P. Wilkes, Company 12, Soldiers' Home, Danville, Illinois.

THUER, or **THEWER, JOHN HENRY.**—Born in January, 1831, at Manchester, Tennessee. Left home when he was fifteen years old. Would like to hear from any of his people. Please write to his daughter, Mrs. Carrie Coats, Commerce, Oklahoma

McFARLAND, GEORGE HIBBARD.—Come back to the Valley. We all forgive you, and love you more than ever. Please write to Clarice, care of this magazine.

HAVOC, EMIL.—Last heard from in Butte, Montana. Please write to your brother, Jim, care of this magazine.

WEIDMAR, MRS. ROY, EARL and **MATTIE WEIDMAR VERCILLOUS.**—Last seen in Rockyford, Colorado, in 1908. Please write to F. M. Wilson, Chatham, Illinois.

CHAPMAN, ALVIN J.—Forty-one years old. Five feet eleven inches tall, dark hair, and blue eyes. Last heard from ten years ago, in Texas. Please write to your daughter, Mrs. Mae Spencer, Box 162, New Holland, Georgia.

CUMMINGS, or **GUIER, LYDIA.**—Last heard from in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, in 1924. Please write to C. C., care of this magazine.

HILL, FRANK.—Please write to your brother, Charlie, care of this magazine.

ATTENTION.—I would like to hear from former members of Company C, Ninth Field Signal Battalion, Signal Corps, who were stationed at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, from 1916, and who went overseas with the Fifth Division, in 1918. Also from members of Company H, Sixty-first Infantry, Fifth Division, in 1918. Please write to Allen A. Stuart, 732½ Fifth Avenue, McKeesport, Pennsylvania.

DROWNE, ROYCE C.—Of Chicago, Illinois. Last heard from, in October, 1922, at Lakeland, en route for Tampa, Florida. Information appreciated by Lodge, care of this magazine.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any one who was in the Seventh Canadian General Hospital, at Etaples, France, when I was admitted there. Address Charles A Hoy, 620 Guelph Street, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.

BALL, ALBERT V.—About fifty-four years old. Five feet eight inches tall, blue eyes brown hair, beginning to get gray. Limps. Last heard from through his sister, Mary, at Amity, Oregon. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Elsie Roberts, Box 73, St. Helens, Oregon.

VIOLET.—We are heartbroken over your not writing. Please write to your mother, care of Mrs. Pearl McCoy, Marrero, Louisiana.

DENNEAU, CHARLES M.—Am sick. Bobbie and I need you. Please write to Squeege, at your aunt's, or care of this magazine.

VORNKAHL, CLARENCE GEORGE.—Thirty-nine years old. A doctor. Born in St. Louis, Missouri. Has not been heard from for fifteen years. Information appreciated by Harry J. Vornkahl, 1027 West Sixth Street, Los Angeles, California.

BAKKE, MRS. CAROLINE.—Please write to your daughter, Thea Bakke, care of this magazine.

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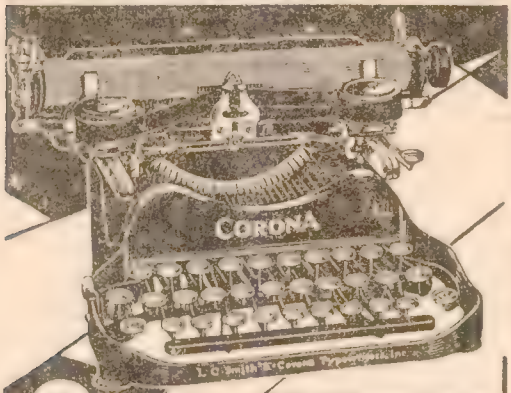

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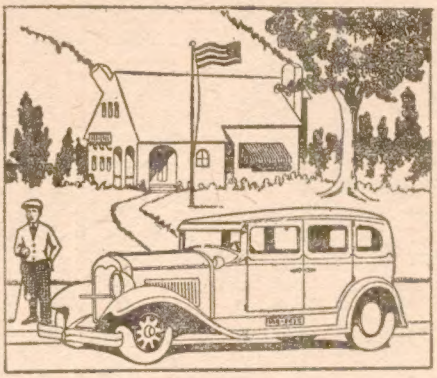

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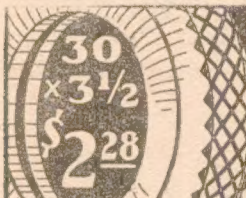

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